

‘Perfect Fit’: Industrial Strategies, Textual Negotiations and Celebrity Culture in Fashion Television

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ABSTRACT

According to the head of the American Costume Designers' Guild, Deborah Nadoolman Landis, fashion is emphatically '*not* costume'. However, if this is the case, how do we approach costume in a television show like Sex and the City (1998-2004), which we know (via press articles and various other extra-textual materials) to be comprised of designer clothes? Once onscreen, are the clothes in Sex and the City to be interpreted as 'costume', rather than 'fashion'?

To be sure, it is important to tease out precise definitions of key terms, but to position fashion as the antithesis of costume is reductive. Landis' claim is based on the assumption that the purpose of costume is to tell a story. She thereby neglects to acknowledge that the audience may read certain costumes *as* fashion - which exists in a framework of discourses that can be located beyond the text. This is particularly relevant with regard to contemporary US television which, according to press reports, has witnessed an emergence of 'fashion programming' - fictional programming with a narrative focus on fashion. Surely then, it is important to look beyond the television text if we are to gain an understanding of the cultural functions and social uses of costume.

While there a small, but important body of work on film costume has developed from a feminist perspective – with a particular focus on gender and the body – the study of television costume continues to be marginalised within the academy. This thesis thus seeks to address this imbalance by focusing specifically on the uses of fashion in television at a time of intriguing intersection between fashion, television and celebrity culture. In so doing, I seek to build a foundation upon which we might begin to understand the cultural function and social uses of costume in a television context. Moreover, this study moves beyond the analysis of costume at the level of text by considering the economic and cultural uses of onscreen fashion in three case studies of 'fashion programming' (Sex and the City, The O.C. (2003-2007) and Ugly Betty (2006-), at the level of industry, text and intertext. This multi-dimensional approach is crucial, I argue, if we are to fully understand the function/s of onscreen fashion.

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Introduction

Prime Time Fashion: Conceptualising Onscreen Fashion and Costume

‘Fashion and costumes are not synonymous; they are antithetical.’¹

Most introductory anthologies on fashion theory begin by asking the question, ‘what is fashion?’ For Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, fashion is considered to be ‘changing styles of dress and appearance that are adopted by a group of people at any given time and place.’² Similarly, Joanne Entwistle describes fashion as ‘a system of dress characterised by an internal logic of regular and systematic change’.³ Yuniya Kawamura defines fashion by what it is not, ‘fashion is ‘not a material product, it is a symbolic product’.⁴ Finally, and as illustrated in the quote above, for the head of the American Costume Designers’ Guild, Deborah Nadoolman Landis, fashion is emphatically *not* costume.

However, if this is the case, how do we approach costume in a television show like Sex and the City (1998-2004), which we know (via press articles and various other extra-textual materials) to be comprised of designer clothes? Indeed, offscreen these clothes *are* symbolic products, representative of a certain style adopted by a group of people, and characterised by an internal logic of regular and systematic change. Once onscreen, are the clothes in Sex and the City to be interpreted as ‘costume’, rather than ‘fashion’?

While it is important to tease out precise definitions of key terms, to position fashion as the antithesis of costume is reductive. Landis’ claim is based on the assumption that the purpose of costume is to tell a story. She thereby neglects to acknowledge that the audience may read certain costumes *as* fashion - which exists in a framework of discourses that can be located beyond the text. This is particularly relevant with regard to contemporary US television which, according to press reports, has witnessed an emergence of ‘fashion programming’ - fictional programming with a narrative focus on fashion. Surely then, it is important to look beyond the television text if we are to gain an understanding of the intended cultural functions and social uses of costume. The following study seeks to move beyond the analysis of costume at the level of text by considering the uses of onscreen

¹ Deborah Nadoolman Landis (2003) Screencraft: Costume Design, Burlington: Focal Press, p. 8

² Linda Welters & Abby Lillethun (2007) ‘Introduction’ in Linda Welters & Abby Lillethun (eds) The Fashion Reader, Oxford & New York: Berg, p. xviii

³ Joanne Entwistle (2000) The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 44

⁴ Yuniya Kawamura (2005) Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies, Oxford & New York: Berg, p. 2

fashion in three case studies of ‘fashion programming’ (Sex and the City, The O.C. (2003-2007) and Ugly Betty (2006-), at the level of industry, text and intertext. This multi-dimensional approach is crucial, I argue, if we are to fully understand the function/s of onscreen fashion.

These three case studies were selected for a variety of reasons (a point which I will return to later), however, most importantly, they are considered in the press as ‘fashion programming’. Indeed, Sex and the City is identified, in the popular press, as a ‘breakthrough’ text that initiated a series of television programmes which put fashion at their centre. Thus, this thesis examines the phenomenon of fashion programming from Sex and the City onwards, as it is clear that the popular press have identified the emergence of Sex and the City, and subsequent examples of fashion programming, as in some way aesthetically and/or ideologically different from historical precursors. At the same time, I am reluctant to consider fashion programming as an entirely new category, or indeed a newly *imagined* category, precisely because there is a lack of historical literature on the subject, which of course is necessary if one is to draw a detailed and sustained comparison. Indeed, a historical study of equal length to this thesis is needed in order to adequately assess such claims of ‘newness’. That said, it is pertinent to briefly acknowledge the possibility of historical precursors to contemporary fashion programming in order to further demonstrate how this study is defining its parameters/object of study.

In her monograph on Sex and the City, Deborah Jermyn acknowledges the thematic similarities between the HBO prime time comedy drama and women-centred comedies from the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s such as I Love Lucy, The Mary Tyler Moore Show (1970-1977), That Girl and The Golden Girls. To be sure, parallels can be drawn between Sex and the City and these women-centred shows in terms of their narrative focus of a single girl in a city, but also, I would add, in terms of their impact upon the fashion industry. Indeed, there are similarities between the examples of fashion programming examined here, and historical precursors such as the The Mary Tyler Moore Show (The MTM Show). The MTM Show, for example, has been identified as an extremely influential show, thought to be responsible for popularising particular fashion trends such

as headscarves, flower print dresses, large necklaces and high-waisted skirts.⁵ Similarly, other examples from the 1980s such as Dynasty and Dallas are considered responsible for reintroducing bold coloured shift dresses, shoulder pads and furs back into popular and high fashion. In terms of male fashion, Miami Vice (1984-1989) is oft-cited as an extremely influential show; it is credited with introducing Gianni Versace's unconstructed suit to the mainstream and according to Jim Moore (creative director of GQ), '[i]t's the first point in fashion history where you can really show a TV having that influence on fashion'.⁶ In addition, The New York Times recently claimed that Miami Vice 'may also have marked the earliest mainstream appearance of that indestructible cultural chimera, the metrosexual'.⁷

That said, it is important to note that while there is evidence to suggest that television shows have long since influenced fashion trends, there are a series of historically specific economic, industrial and cultural factors which must be considered. For example, there is evidence to suggest that during the late 1990s shifts occurred within the fashion market (such as, the emergence of 'off-the-rack' designer garments in department stores), consumer (individual's supposed increasing desire for material 'lifestyle' goods)⁸ and celebrity culture (e.g. the supposed 'democratisation' of fame).⁹ Equally, media scholars note that the 1990s witnessed extreme economic and cultural change for the US television industry such as the emergence of the multichannel/digital era,¹⁰ and consequently, these contextual factors must be taken into account when assessing the relationship between the fashion and television industries.

As John Corner usefully reminds us, in approaching the relationship between contemporary television and television historiography, there is always a danger of creating

⁵ The show continues to be a source of inspiration for contemporary fashion as numerous fashion blogs testify. For example see: <http://www.whowhatwear.com/website/full-article/currently-channeling-mary-rhoda/> (accessed 21/12/10)

⁶ http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/20/fashion/20MIAMI.html?_r=1&pagewanted=1&n=Top/Reference/Time%20Topics/People/T/Trebay,%20Guy (accessed 21/12/10)

⁷ http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/20/fashion/20MIAMI.html?_r=1&pagewanted=1&n=Top/Reference/Time%20Topics/People/T/Trebay,%20Guy (accessed 21/12/10)

⁸ See Mike Featherstone (2000) 'Lifestyle and Consumer Culture' in Martyn J. Lee (ed) The Consumer Society Reader, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing

⁹ These issues will be discussed in more detail in the first section

¹⁰ Brian L. Ott (2007) The Small Screen: How Television Equips Us to Live in the Information Age, Oxford: Blackwell, Amanda D. Lotz (2007) The Television Will Be Revolutionized, New York: New York University Press

an ‘undue proximity’¹¹ between the past and present (and thus ignoring or erasing important historical differences). I do not wish to do this here, and thus primarily gesture toward past examples, precisely because they would need their own detailed analysis. Instead, rather than pursuing this diachronic approach, my aim is more synchronic: to examine the late 1990s onwards as a period of intriguing intersection between fashion, television and celebrity culture.

The study of costume and cinema, like the study of fashion, has only recently become a legitimate area of academic interest, which is surprising given that, as Church Gibson argues, it ‘is an important site of filmic pleasure’.¹² Following the publication of Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog’s influential book Fabrications in 1990, a small, but important body of work has developed from a feminist perspective – with a particular focus on gender and the body.¹³ Television costume, however, has received considerably less critical attention,¹⁴ and this thesis thus seeks to address this imbalance by focussing specifically on *fashion as costume* in a television context.

Despite Landis’ claim that fashion cannot be costume, most of the existing scholarship regarding costume and cinema is informed to some degree by fashion theory developed in both US and UK contexts. Indeed, work on clothes and the body, and fashion and society, are also crucial to this study which seeks to contribute to debates regarding onscreen fashion, identity and consumption. What follows then, is a brief outline of key debates within fashion theory, costume and cinema and television scholarship which form the framework of this study.

Fashion, Feminism and Popular Culture

¹¹ John Corner (2003) ‘Finding Data, Reading Patterns, Telling Stories: Issues in the Historiography of Television’ Media, Culture and Society 25 p. 277

¹² Pamela Church Gibson (1998) ‘Film Costume’, in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds) The Oxford Guide to Film Studies, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 36

¹³ Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog’s influential collection Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body, published in 1990 is often cited as the inspiration for studies such as Sarah Street (2002) Costume and Cinema: Dress Codes in Popular Film, London: Wallflower, Sarah Berry (2000) Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood, Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota, Rachel Moseley (eds) (2005) Fashioning Film Stars: Dress Culture and Identity, London: BFI

¹⁴ The following are article length projects which examine television costume, see: Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (2004) “‘Fashion is the Fifth Character’: Fashion, Costume and Character in Sex and the City in Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (eds) Reading Sex and the City, London: I.B Tauris pp.115-130 and Janet McCabe (2006) ‘What is with that hair? Bree van de Kamp and Policing Contemporary Femininity in Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (eds) (2006) Reading Desperate Housewives: Beyond the White Picket Fence, London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 74-86

In their introduction to Fashion Cultures, Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson posit that '[p]art of the perceived problem with fashion has been that academics in particular have not always known with what tone to approach and write about it – it's too trivial to theorise, too serious to ignore.'¹⁵ Indeed, this understanding emerges out of longstanding tensions regarding taking popular culture (particularly that which is coded as 'feminine') seriously. As such, scholars have attempted to 'explain away' western culture's preoccupation with fashion from two very different academic perspectives.¹⁶ Art historians initially called for the legitimisation of fashion as an area of study. However, their interest was limited to *haute couture*,¹⁷ and work on fashion within an art history tradition focussed exclusively on the conservative (and inherently masculine) notions of production and authorship. As Joanne Hollows notes, 'art historians have analysed the ways in which great designers as artists have stamped their clothes with the mark of genius'.¹⁸ According to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the function of an author is 'that of a producer who aims to be autonomous that is, entirely the master of his product'.¹⁹ It is therefore possible to understand the designer as author, given that the designer is constructed as 'the master of his product'. Drawing on Bourdieu, Kawamura argues that, '[w]ithout designers, clothes do not become fashion'.²⁰ This is precisely because of the important position which designers hold within the fashion system as the producer of fashion's symbolic value. Moreover, she suggests those designers associated with the French fashion system were considered 'legitimate' artists.²¹ Designers of *haute couture* therefore, were not only considered the creators of fashion as 'art', but also as the creators of public taste.

¹⁵ Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (2000) 'Introduction' in Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (eds) Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis, London & New York: Routledge p. 2

¹⁶ Elizabeth Wilson (1985) Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity, London: Virago Press p. 47

¹⁷ *Haute couture* (French for high sewing) refers to custom made garments made in Paris – while the term has been used to describe all made-to-order designer clothes, in order for a fashion house to use the label it must conform to formal criteria (e.g. it must have a certain number of employees and participate in specific fashion shows). A list of eligible houses is made every year by the French Ministry of Industry. In addition, most *haute couture* houses will produce ready-to-wear fashion (*prêt-à-porter*) to generate a profit. A more detailed account of the term and how it has been used over time can be found in C Breward (2003) Fashion (Oxford History of Art) Oxford: Oxford University Press, Elizabeth Ewing (1974) History of Twentieth Century Fashion, London: Batsford, Evelyn Grace (1978) Introduction to Fashion, New York: Prentice Hall, Tim Jackson and David Shaw (2005) The Fashion Handbook, London: Routledge, Sandra Ley (1975) Fashion for Everyone: The Story of Ready-to-Wear (1870s-1970s), New York: Scribners

¹⁸ Joanne Hollows (2000) Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, p. 138

¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu (1984) Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste, London: Routledge, p.468

²⁰ Kawamura, Fashion-ology, p. 57

²¹ Kawamura, Fashion-ology, pp.57-72

Given that the notion of the author was, and remains still, central to the construction of value judgements within art and culture more generally, high fashion was accepted within the field of art history as a serious object of study.²² Subsequently, this resulted in a division between academic approaches to high fashion and ‘everyday’ fashion. Mass produced everyday fashion (often perceived as ‘feminine’), was not considered a legitimate area of study in its own right, and was rather used as a lens through which social scientists and cultural critics could view the apparent ‘evils’ of capitalism. In her influential book Adorned in Dreams, Elizabeth Wilson comments on this development and notes:

[i]t was easy to believe that the function of fashion stemmed from capitalism’s need for perpetual expansion, which encouraged consumption. At its crudest, this kind of explanation assumes that changes in fashion are foisted upon us, especially women, in a conspiracy to consume far more than we ‘need’ to.²³

As such, fashion was viewed as ‘excessive’ and ‘unnecessary’, and those (women) who participated in its consumption were considered to be cultural dupes.²⁴ Thorstein Veblen, whose work is thought to have influenced theorists such as Bourdieu and Jean Baudrillard (who suggested that consumption is as ‘much a *cultural activity and process* as it is an economic one’ [emphasis in original]²⁵), famously disparaged middle-class or leisure-class women’s attitudes to consumption as a way of performing status, and he termed this ‘conspicuous consumption’.²⁶

Bourdieu adopts a similar perspective insofar as he also suggests that consumption practices are socially structured. In his canonical book Distinction, Bourdieu argues that ‘taste’ is not arbitrary, but rather it is deeply ideological and structured in relation to social divisions.²⁷ Thus, taste becomes a marker of class. With this in mind, Bourdieu suggests that it is possible to classify taste into three distinct categories, all of which correlate to

²² I am using the term high fashion to include *haute couture* and designer fashion created within other cultural centres including Japan, London and New York

²³ Wilson, Adorned in Dreams, p. 4

²⁴ Consumption has become an increasingly fragmented term and as such I employ Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot’s definition in All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth Century Consumer Culture (2000) London and New York: Cassell, which they claim ‘involves not just the purchasing and using up of items produced by the commercial world, but also bringing meanings to items, appropriating them, making them and, indeed taking them, as one’s own’. p. 2

²⁵ Jean Baudrillard paraphrased by Martyn J. Lee (2000) ‘Introduction’, in Martyn J. Lee (eds) The Consumer Society Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, p. xiii

²⁶ Thorstein Veblen (1990) [1975] The Theory of the Leisure Class, London: Allen & Unwin

²⁷ Bourdieu, Distinction,

particular social classes; ‘highbrow’ (‘legitimate’), ‘middlebrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ (‘popular’).

In Bourdieu’s terms, class is not exclusively defined by economic capital, but is also constructed in relation to varying degrees of ‘cultural capital’.²⁸ Cultural capital, he argues, is made up of specific knowledge and competences, and relies upon particular predispositions (manifest in one’s ‘habitus’).²⁹ The precise nature of these competences varies between class stratifications and thus individuals consume different cultural goods/texts in different ways. For example, Bourdieu demonstrates that the dominant class is equipped with the competences to recognise (and appreciate) ‘legitimate’ culture. He terms this the ‘aesthetic disposition’ or ‘pure gaze’, which fundamentally relies upon the rejection of the ‘popular aesthetic’ and the ability to appreciate form over function.

Moreover, bearers of the ‘pure gaze’ occupy privileged positions as ‘established authorities’ on legitimate culture thereby playing a crucial role in its legitimation; creating *distinctions* between legitimate and non legitimate (popular) forms of culture. Indeed, these *distinctions* are continually negotiated and (re)produced as the legitimacy/value of cultural goods is never fixed. As Stuart Hall notes, cultural forms often move up (and down) the ‘cultural escalator’³⁰ and as a result, it is crucial to consider, as Bourdieu does, ‘the forces and relations which sustain the distinction, the difference...[the] institutions and institutional processes ...required to sustain each - and to continually mark the difference between them.’³¹ Moreover, as Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich note, ‘for Bourdieu, these distinctions are neither claims about the character of specific texts, nor about the actual activities of specific consumers. They are the ways in which cultural distinctions are produced and maintained so as to reproduce the dominant order.’³²

It should also be noted here, that it is not simply that the dominant class dictates ‘legitimate taste’ and that the working class are denied access to it, rather, it has been argued that

²⁸ It should be noted that these are not mutually exclusive – as John Storey notes, it is possible to have an abundance of cultural capital and little economic capital and vice versa. See Dan Laughey (2007) Key Themes in Media Theory, Maidenhead: Open University Press, p. 188

²⁹ Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ refers to a structure of ‘dispositions’ which predispose an individual to certain choices and actions and is examined in more detail in Chapter Six.

³⁰ Stuart Hall (1981) ‘Notes on Deconstructing the Popular’, in Ralph Samuel (ed) People’s History and Socialist Theory, London: Routledge, p. 234

³¹ Hall, ‘Notes on Deconstructing the Popular’, p. 234

³² Joanne Hollows & Mark Jancovich (1995) ‘Introduction: Popular Film and Cultural Distinction’, in Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich (eds) Approaches to Popular Film, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, p. 6

working class individuals vehemently reject the terms of the ‘pure gaze’ and purposefully resist certain forms of ‘legitimate’ culture. Therefore, as Don Slater notes, ‘it is not simply that culture is determined by class; rather culture becomes a means of class competition itself’.³³ Thus, Bourdieu usefully demonstrates how cultural consumption is ‘predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social difference’³⁴ and therefore, becomes crucial to the way in which individuals display/manipulate their cultural identity.

Thus Bourdieu’s work challenges more historical studies of identity in which mass culture critics were of the opinion that cultural identity was formed in relation to productive labour and that one’s sense of self relies on one’s relationship to production as opposed to consumption. As Bourdieu’s work attests, this assumption fails to acknowledge the complex processes of meaning making which emerge through consumption practices (briefly sketched above), and as Hollows notes, ‘from such a perspective, consumption is not only *not* work ...but it is also not a source of our “real” identity’.³⁵

For women, identity has historically been associated more with consumption as opposed to production. As Bourdieu describes, bourgeois women were ‘partially being excluded from economic activity (and therefore) find fulfilment in stage-managing the décor of bourgeois existence’.³⁶ What is apparent in both Bourdieu’s and Veblen’s work is that the female identity is formed entirely through processes of consumption and relies heavily upon image management.³⁷ However, whereas Bourdieu implies that consumption practices could prove to be a potentially resistive and subversive activity, Veblen is firmly of the opinion that feminine identity is ‘inauthentic’. It is important to note here that Veblen’s assumption that the feminine identity as ‘inauthentic’ is clearly intended as a criticism. Indeed, as Entwistle explains, ‘the pressure of clothing to reveal the “authentic” intentions of the wearer was greater for women in the nineteenth century who...were constructed as the moral guardians of Protestant, bourgeois culture and therefore had to be “honest” and

³³ Don Slater (1997) Consumer Culture and Modernity, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 160

³⁴ Bourdieu, Distinction, p. 7

³⁵ Hollows, Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture, p. 113

³⁶ Bourdieu, Distinction p.55

³⁷ Indeed, this concept has been interrogated within feminist scholarship. For example, Judith Butler’s (1990) book Gender Trouble, New York: Routledge, critiques the concept of the female identity and in so doing suggests that gender is not a biological category, but rather is socially inscribed. She draws on existing feminist work which has also sought to examine the female identity such as Simone DeBeauvoir (1953) The Second Sex, trans H.M Parshley, New York: Knopf

“‘true’”.³⁸ Moreover, this understanding of the feminine identity as artificial is couched within the longstanding assumption that the feminine is ‘trivial, superficial, lacking in substance [and] irrational’.³⁹

These negative understandings of fashion, as ‘superficial, narcissistic and wasteful’,⁴⁰ structured early feminist discourse regarding fashion consumption and the performance of femininity. For example, in the 1850s, American women’s rights advocate Amelia Bloomer considered certain apparel such as the corset as a form of ‘bondage’, responsible for the physical incapacitation of women.⁴¹ Similarly, feminists in the 1970s and 1980s struggled to view fashion as anything other than a tool in the oppression and exploitation of women.⁴² Joanne Hollows argues that this ‘functionalist’ feminist critique of fashion ‘generated two different types of feminist anti-fashion and anti-beauty practices’.⁴³ While some rejected feminine clothes in favour of ‘masculine’ apparel, others favoured the ‘natural’ self. However, in rejecting feminine dress, feminists were arguably privileging ‘masculinity’ and masculine values over femininity and feminine values. Similarly, those seeking to reclaim the ‘natural’ self privileged the ‘natural’ over the ‘artificial.’ Not only does this dichotomy fail to acknowledge the constructedness of a ‘natural’ identity, thereby confusing the term ‘natural’ with ‘authentic’, but it also problematically associates ‘artifice’ with ‘passivity’. This concept has since been challenged by more recent feminist scholarship.⁴⁴

Indeed, while second wave feminism sought to condemn fashion as trivial and inconsequential, more recent feminist criticism complicates this notion. Church Gibson posits that Wilson’s book Adorned in Dreams was crucial in making fashion ‘a legitimate sphere of feminist scholarship’.⁴⁵ In her examination of fashion and modernity, Wilson argues that fashion should be considered as a ‘performance art’, and in so doing critiques

³⁸ Entwistle, The Fashioned Body, p. 121

³⁹ Llewellyn Negrin (1999) ‘The Self as Image: A Critical Appraisal of Postmodern Theories of Fashion’, Theory, Culture & Society 16:3 p. 108

⁴⁰ Bruzzi & Gibson, ‘Introduction’, p. 2

⁴¹ Dexter C. Bloomer, (1975) [1895] Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer, New York: Schocken Books

⁴² Susan Brownmiller (1984) Femininity, New York: Linden Press, Ann Oakley (1981) Subject Women, New York: Pantheon, Nancy Baker (1984) The Beauty Trap, New York: Franklin Watts and Rosalind Coward (1984) Female Desire: Women’s Sexuality Today, London: Paladin

⁴³ Hollows, Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture, p. 140

⁴⁴ The ‘natural’/‘authenticity’ debate is explored in further detail in the second section of this thesis.

⁴⁵ Pamela Church Gibson (2000) ‘Redressing the Balance: Patriarchy, Postmodernism and Feminism’, in Bruzzi & Gibson (eds) Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis, London & New York: Routledge p. 352

second wave feminism's disparaging attitudes toward 'artifice' and 'performativity'. Wilson's work is thus part of a broader shift in which consumerism is viewed as less 'oppressive', and audiences are viewed as more 'active' than in previous accounts.⁴⁶ For example, Angela Partington's study of fashion in post war Britain presents the construction of the 'artificial' feminine identity as that which requires 'an active gaze to decode, utilise and identify with those images'.⁴⁷ Using the New Look as an example, she suggests that women appropriated fashion in order to articulate class identities, thereby challenging previous feminist thought which relied on the assumption that fashion (and culture in general) was 'a mere expression of socio-economic relations rather than as a site of the active production of consumers'.⁴⁸ Indeed, this process required a specific set of consumer competences, in order to create and disrupt class identities.⁴⁹ In addition, as Partington acknowledges, this reveals a resistance to the 'proper' consumer practices which were supposedly imposed on women through advertising and perhaps most importantly through cinema and the 'woman's film'.⁵⁰ It has been claimed that the 1940s 'woman's film' sought to address women as consumers in order to regulate and secure the economy (previously jeopardised by the great depression). That is, the 'woman's film' was intended to educate women in consumer competences, and encourage them to use these skills in the consumption of fashion and beauty products. Therefore, as Hollows notes, '[i]f cinema has

⁴⁶ For example, Linda M Scott (2005) *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, seeks to complicate second wave feminist assumptions about fashion.

⁴⁷ Angela Partington (1992) 'Popular Fashion and Working-Class Affluence', in Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (eds) *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader*, London: Pandora Press, p. 156

⁴⁸ Partington, 'Popular Fashion and Working-Class Affluence', p. 149

⁴⁹ Indeed, useful contributions within fashion theory have explored fashion as a semiotic system such as: Malcolm Barnard (2007) *Fashion Theory: A Reader*, London: Routledge, Malcolm Barnard (2008) *Fashion as Communication*, London: Routledge, Roland Barthes (1983) *The Fashion System* trans Matthew Ward and Richard Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, Roland Barthes (2006) *The Language of Fashion*, Oxford: Berg, Ingrid Brenninkmeyer (1963) *The Sociology of Fashion*, Paris: Librairie du Recueil Sirey, Edmund Bergler (1953) *Fashion and the Unconscious*, New York: Robert Brunner, C Breward (1995) *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, C Breward and C Evans (eds) (2005) *Fashion and Modernity*, Oxford: Berg, Fred Davis (1994) *Fashion Culture and Identity*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, R. Ewen (1988) *All Consuming Images: the Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* New York: Basic Books, J.C. Flugel, (1976) *Psychology of Clothes*, Ams Pr Inc, P Glynn (1978) *In Fashion: Dress in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, Ali Guy, Eileen Green and Maura Banim (2000) *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationships with their Clothes*, Oxford & New York: Berg, Anne Hollander (1975) *Seeing Through Clothes*, New York: Viking/Penguin, Alison Lurie, (1981) *The Language of Clothes*, New York: Owl Books, C. McDowell (1992) *Dressed to Kill: Sex, Power and Clothes*, London: Hutchinson Ted Polhemus (1988) *Body Styles*, Luton: Lennard Publishing, Joanne Bubolz and Mary Ellen Roach (eds) (1965) *Dress, Adornment and Social Order*, New York: Wiley

⁵⁰ Mary Ann Doane (1987) *The Desire to desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, Indiana: Bloomington Press, suggests that the 'woman's film' 'deal[s] with a female protagonist and often appear to allow her significant access to point of view structures... They tread problems defined as "female"... and most critically, are directed at a female audience.', p. 3

played a role in educating women in the knowledges, skills and competences that are necessary to sustain consumer markets, then it also offers women an opportunity to use these feminine competences in watching a film'.⁵¹

In her book, *The Desire to Desire*, Mary Ann Doane suggests that the 1940s 'woman's film' was designed to position the female spectator as consumer. In a rather bleak account of women's relationship with cinema, she describes how the cinema marketed 'a certain feminine self-image',⁵² achieved through the consumption of the fashion and beauty products which are advertised onscreen. In so doing, she argues, the female spectator is commodifying herself, i.e. offering herself as an object for men. She argues that when presented with the image of a glamorous female star, women are 'invited to witness [their] own commodification and, furthermore to buy an image of herself insofar as the female star is proposed as the ideal for feminine beauty'.⁵³ However, I would argue that Doane's work fails to acknowledge the polysemic/pluralistic nature of fashion, nor does she consider the myriad of ways in which audiences could engage with both the woman's film, and the consumption of fashion. While Doane's analysis positions the female-spectator as inherently passive, a similar argument has been waged with regard to contemporary lifestyle television which offers a more positive view of the female consumer. This can be viewed, of course, as part of a broader shift within feminist scholarship which seeks to reassess the political possibilities of feminine culture.⁵⁴

In her article 'Makeover Takeover on British Television', Rachel Moseley argues that the makeover/lifestyle programmes of the postfeminist era,⁵⁵ share thematic terrain with the woman's film. However, she argues that rather than positioning the audience as passive consumers, lifestyle shows are more concerned with the 'democratisation' of taste by

⁵¹ Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture*, p. 154

⁵² Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, p. 26

⁵³ Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, p. 24

⁵⁴ For example, Christine Geraghty (1991) *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime Time Soaps*, Oxford: Polity Press, Christine Gledhill (1989) 'Pleasurable Negotiations' in E.D. Pribram (ed), *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, London: Verso pp. 64-89, Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley (eds) (2006) *Feminism in Popular Culture*, Oxford & New York: Berg, A. Kuhn (1982) *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*, London: Routledge, Janice Radway (1991) *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, London: University of North Carolina Press

⁵⁵ While as Sarah Projansky (2001) notes in *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture*, New York: New York University Press, 'Because postfeminism is and can be so many different things, it is a powerful, pervasive and versatile cultural concept', p. 68. As such, I am adopting Angela McRobbie's (2004) definition in 'Post feminism and Popular Culture', *Feminist Media Studies*, 4:3, pp. 255-264

making consumer competences available to broad audiences.⁵⁶ While concerns arose that lifestyle television (in both the US and UK) addresses the viewing public as ‘mindless consumers’ rather than ‘informed citizens’, Moseley suggests elsewhere that this is not the case. She claims that lifestyle TV in the UK context ‘represents a complex conjunction between the two, in which the personal and the private are figured as significant spaces in which citizens can, on a small scale, learn to make changes, make a difference, improve the person for the national good.’⁵⁷ This argument has been taken up by Martin Roberts in his discussion of US and UK lifestyle television and postfeminism. Roberts claims that ‘[i]n effect, lifestyle television transforms consumption *into* a form of citizenship, a duty that we are all, as responsible citizens, required to perform for the general good.’⁵⁸ The counter argument to this, of course, is the notion that lifestyle television, like the woman’s film, still promotes and polices specific notions of femininity. The lifestyle or makeover programme, it is argued, encourages (female) viewers to understand ‘the self as project’ in need of improvement and ‘naturalises a model of feminine identity and female power inseparable from consumption’.⁵⁹ This is not to suggest that fashion should be entirely dismissed from a feminist perspective, but rather, as this study seeks to highlight, it is important to examine the precise ways in which these opposing viewpoints are constructed and perpetuated in contemporary culture. Moreover, this study argues that fashion’s exhibition in onscreen media is one of the central ways in which these struggles are played out.

These examinations of onscreen fashion in academia have, for the most part, focussed solely on the texts themselves. However, a productive examination of the wider circulation of cultural and social uses of onscreen fashion has taken place within the field of star studies.

Fashion, Stardom and Celebrity

⁵⁶ Rachel Moseley (2000) ‘Makeover takeover on British Television’, *Screen*, 41:3, pp. 299-314

⁵⁷ Rachel Moseley (2001) “‘Real Lads Do Cook...but Some Things Are Still Hard to Talk About’: The Gendering of 8-9” in Charlotte Brunsdon, Catherine Johnson, Rachel Moseley and Helen Wheatley, ‘Factual Entertainment on British Television – the Midlands TV Research Group’s ‘8-9 Project’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4:1 pp. 32-9

⁵⁸ Martin Roberts (2007) ‘The Fashion Police: Governing the Self in *What Not to Wear*’ in Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (eds) *Interrogating Postfeminism*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 228

⁵⁹ Roberts, ‘The Fashion Police’, p. 232

In his 1979 book Stars, Richard Dyer examines the concept of the film star and its cultural, economic and political function within popular culture. In his analysis of ‘stars as images’, Dyer suggests the importance of fashion in the construction and circulation of the star image.⁶⁰ Seeking to expand upon Dyer’s early work, a body of feminist scholarship has emerged which examines the *consumption* of the star image – which also foregrounds the importance of fashion in the process of making stars *mean* – for indeed, as with film costume, star fashions are a central audience pleasure.⁶¹ This body of work often concerns itself specifically with female star/fan relationships. For example, Jackie Stacey’s book Star Gazing offers a feminist critique of the relationship between fans and female stars of the classical era.⁶² In so doing, she challenges existing feminist film theory which is primarily concerned with ‘images of women’ in media, arguing that previous work which seeks to examine how the media socialises women into traditional gender roles (such as Laura Mulvey’s influential essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ and Molly Haskell’s book From Reverence to Rape)⁶³ is conducted solely at a textual level and therefore neglects to consider the role of the audience in the meaning making process. For Stacey, the fan practices of female filmgoers in the classical era complicate previous assumptions regarding the ‘woman as image’ insofar as female fans often appropriate, and identify with, star images in myriad and complex ways. In her analysis of the identificatory practices of fans, she claims that fans often actively participated in appropriating certain elements of particular star fashions in order to construct their own individual identities.

The specific focus on female stars and their relationship to fashion speaks to the ways in which the cultural function of the star image is informed by gender. In her article ‘Re-Examining Stardom: Questions of Texts, Bodies and Performance’, Christine Geraghty argues that ‘women stars do operate in a different context from their male counterparts’.

⁶⁰ Section three offers a more detailed overview of Dyer’s work.

⁶¹ Indeed, the numerous ‘coffee-table’ books on star images and their fashion is testament to this – see Patty Fox (1995) Star Style: Hollywood Legends as Fashion Icons, Santa Monica: Angel City Press, Jane Eastoe and Sarah Gristwood (2008) Fabulous Frocks, Oxford: Pavillion, Simone Werle (2009) Fashionistas: A Century of Style Icons, London: Prestel

⁶² Jackie Stacey (1994) Stargazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship, London: Routledge

⁶³ Laura Mulvey (1989) [1975] ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ in Laura Mulvey (ed) Visual and Other Pleasures, Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp.14-31 Molly Haskell (1987) [1974] From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies, London and Chicago: Chicago University Press

Geraghty posits that ‘the category of celebrity is one which works well for female stars’.⁶⁴

She writes:

Women function effectively as spectacle in the press and on television as well as in the cinema. In addition, the common association in popular culture between women and the private sphere of celebrity, on the private life of personal relationships and domesticity fits with the emphasis in the discourse of celebrity on private life and leisure activity of the star.⁶⁵

Similarly, in his analysis of Sandra Bullock, Peter Kramer suggests that ‘[w]hile female stars...dominate magazine covers and the talk show circuit there are numerous indicators showing that in Hollywood they usually do not amount to much [in terms of box office bankability]’.⁶⁶ Inherent within both of these comments is the fact that female stars are often made visible precisely because of their ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’. As such, fashion and style are of the upmost importance and the function of fashion as a marker of cultural identity is arguably made more apparent given that it is mediated, and made visible through, the circulation of the star image in celebrity intertexts.

To return to Geraghty’s comments above, it is important to note that the ‘category of celebrity’ is especially pertinent here. In Geraghty’s article she explores the specificities of categories of fame in an attempt to articulate their (gendered) difference. The difference between star and celebrity has long since been debated within the field insofar as some scholars argue they have different functions. The most common assumption is that stardom is reserved exclusively for film actors and relies upon the ability to maintain a ‘duality between actor and character’.⁶⁷ To use Dyer’s initial definition, the star is necessarily contradictory and ambiguous given that it must simultaneously appear ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’. On the contrary, it has been argued that television actors achieve ‘celebrity’ or ‘personality’ status. For example, John Langer’s early essay ‘Television’s Personality System’ argues that the television actors ‘exist as more or less stable “identities” within the flow of events situations and narratives’.⁶⁸ In accordance, John Ellis notes that the television personality is ‘too ordinary’ and fails to embody the

⁶⁴ Christine Geraghty (2007) ‘Re-examining Stardom: Questions of Texts, Bodies and Performance’ in Su Holmes and Sean Redmond (eds) *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, London: Sage, p. 106

⁶⁵ Geraghty, ‘Re-examining Stardom’, p. 106

⁶⁶ Peter Kramer (2004) ‘The Rise and Fall of Sandra Bullock: Notes on Starmaking and Female Stardom in Contemporary Hollywood’, in Andy Willis (ed) *Film Stars: Hollywood and Beyond*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, p. 89

⁶⁷ It is also supposed that famous musicians and sportspersons can achieve ‘star’ status.

⁶⁸ John Langer (1981) ‘Television’s Personality System’ *Media Culture and Society*, 3:4 p. 357

‘ordinary/extraordinary’ paradox. However more recent developments within celebrity culture have obscured these definite taxonomies of fame. This is often attributed to the increase in celebrity magazines, and the increasing speed and saturation of internet ‘gossip’ blogs resulting in the ‘democratisation’ of the celebrity/star image.⁶⁹

In conjunction with this cultural turn in celebrity culture, academic approaches to fame have also shifted. Recent work on stardom and celebrity appears to emphasise the ‘political economy’ of fame⁷⁰ and often focuses on contemporary celebrity culture.⁷¹ In his book Claims to Fame, Joshua Gamson provides a useful analysis of fame in the contemporary landscape and suggests that there are two explanations of fame which jostle for dominance within celebrity culture.⁷² He argues that in the earlier part of the twentieth century, the star system foregrounded discourses of ‘talent’, ‘star quality’ and ‘personality’ as the dominant explanation for fame. In the latter part of the twentieth century, Gamson demonstrates how an increase in extra-textual material designed to offer ‘supposedly unmediated access’⁷³ to the processes of fame serves to present the star/celebrity as an ‘artificially manufactured’ image. This, he claims, encourages readers ‘to visit the real self behind those images...[in so doing, the] public discovers and makes famous certain people because it (with the help of magazines) *sees through* the publicity-generated, artificial self to the real, deserving special self’[emphasis in original].⁷⁴ That said, he also argues that earlier explanations of fame are not evacuated from contemporary celebrity culture, but rather that they are less pervasive than the ‘manufacture’ discourse. This interconnects with broader debates mobilised in cultural theory regarding both the ‘postmodern’ and ‘reflexive’ self. While it has been claimed that identity has long since pivoted on notions of performance⁷⁵, academic work on the subject of selfhood has noted a shift towards a more

⁶⁹ Indeed, it is important not to overstate the ‘newness’ of this shift given that fan magazines of the Classical Era also sought to offer ‘behind-the-scenes’ material to readers.

⁷⁰ Graeme Turner (2004) Understanding Celebrity, London: Sage Publications, Graeme Turner, Frances Bonner and P. David Marshall (2000) (eds) Fame Games: The Production of Celebrity in Australia, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Jessica Evans and David Hesmondhalgh (eds) (2005) Understanding Media: Inside Celebrity, Berkshire: Open University Press

⁷¹ Ellis Cashmore (2006) Celebrity Culture, London: Routledge, Barry King (2003) ‘Embodying an Elastic Self: The Parametrics of Contemporary Stardom’ in Thomas Austin and Martin Barker (eds) Contemporary Hollywood Stardom, London: Arnold

⁷² Joshua Gamson (1994) Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America, London & California: University of California Press

⁷³ Turner, Understanding Celebrity, p. 10

⁷⁴ Joshua Gamson (2001) ‘The Assembly Line of Greatness: Celebrity in Twentieth Century America’ in C. L. Harrington & D.D. Bielby, Popular Culture: Production and Consumption Oxford: Blackwell, p. 270

⁷⁵ See Erving Goffman (1990) [1959] The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life, Harmondsworth: Penguin

‘mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflexive [model of identity that is]... subject to change and innovation’.⁷⁶ Indeed, in the contemporary period, the now familiar claims that identity is increasingly fragmented, unstable and ‘artificial’ resonates, to varying extents, with academic and popular discourses on selfhood. However, there remains some disparity over precisely when this move towards a fragmented identity began, and what particular social change (or changes) were responsible for it.

Indeed, postmodern theory offers a pervasive (yet problematic) perspective on contemporary identity, which suggests that the ‘subject has disintegrated into a flux of euphoric intensities...and no longer possesses the depth, substantiality and coherence that was the ideal and occasional achievement of the modern self’.⁷⁷ Thus, the postmodern model of selfhood suggests that traditional power structures (gender, race and class) no longer shape identity.

This concept of selfhood has been challenged by some scholars as it suggests a qualitative break from modern models of identity. Indeed, as Kellner notes, the *modern* self also pivots on a degree of flexibility/fluidity. Similarly, Anthony Giddens’s well known work on the ‘reflexive self’, argues that ‘the self today is for everyone a reflexive project – a more or less continuous interrogation of past, present and future’.⁷⁸ Thus, for Giddens, the contemporary self is informed by previous models of selfhood and their relationship to society. Indeed, the reflexive self has become a dominant model within media studies, in particular work on lifestyle and makeover television, as it engages with discourses of the ‘individual’ while also acknowledging the persistence of gender, race and class in the construction of contemporary identity.

To be sure, the concept of the postmodern self shares some characteristics with the ‘reflexive self’ insofar as both are underpinned by a notion of ‘uncertainty’ and ‘choice’, and while the notion of a postmodern self is flawed, the anxieties it engenders resonate within contemporary celebrity (and consumer) culture. Thus, the increasing coverage of celebrity which encourages individuals to reflect upon the construction of the celebrity image, while simultaneously attempting to locate an ‘authentic self’, can be viewed as symptomatic of this supposed broader shift.

⁷⁶ Douglas Kellner (1992) ‘Popular Culture and the Construction of Postmodern Identities’, in S. Lash and J. Friedman (eds) *Modernity and Identity*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 141-177

⁷⁷ Kellner, ‘Popular Culture and the Construction of Postmodern Identities’, p. 144

⁷⁸ Anthony Giddens (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 30

Indeed, these shifts, of course, have broader implications for the study of fashion and celebrity. For example, in her article ‘Sharon Stone in a Gap Turtleneck’, Rebecca Epstein examines how the increase in celebrity literature (and ‘fashion reporting’) impacts upon the star’s role as a style icon. She argues that in contrast to those stars of the classical era (who she claims functioned as ‘style dictators’), contemporary star styles are subject to increasing scrutiny and criticism by audiences. Thus, according to Epstein, audiences are fully aware of the performative nature of fashion, and are invited to ‘deconstruct’ the ‘styled’ celebrity image. While Epstein offers a useful analysis of the importance of fashion within contemporary star/audience relationships, there is little work which examines in any detail the specific nature of the relationship between fashion and the television star.

As Rachel Moseley notes in the introduction to her edited collection Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture and Identity, it is in ‘the body of scholarship which looks at film costume...that we find the most extended discussion of the significance of the relationship between star and dress’.⁷⁹ As such, the following surveys the existing material on film costume, assessing its use-value to this project.

Fashion, Costume and Cinema

To begin with, it is important to note that the existing body of work on fashion in film is informed by the long-standing assumption that fashion acts primarily as ‘spectacle’ and a ‘distraction’, thus disrupting the economy of narrative flow. In her influential article ‘Costume and Narrative’, Jane Gaines argues, in relation to classical realist cinema, that all aspects of mise-en-scene serve ‘the higher purpose of narrative’.⁸⁰ She claims costume in the classical era was motivated by characterisation, and that it was essentially required to remain ‘subservient’ to narrative demands. Failure to do so could ‘distract the viewer from the narrative’.⁸¹ Underpinning this argument is Mulvey’s well known concept of ‘the gaze’. Just as Mulvey has argued that ‘[t]he presence of woman [onscreen]...tends to work against the development of a story-line [and] freeze the flow of action’,⁸² Gaines asserts

⁷⁹ Rachel Moseley (2005) ‘Introduction’ in Rachel Moseley (eds) Fashioning Film Stars: Dress Culture and Identity, London: BFI, p. 4

⁸⁰ Jane Gaines (1990) ‘Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman’s Story’, in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds) Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body, London and New York Routledge p. 181

⁸¹ Gaines, ‘Costume and Narrative’, p. 193

⁸² Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema’, p. 19

that costume which is not adequately motivated by character could also result in a disruption of narrative, 'breaking the illusion and the spell of realism'.⁸³

Gaines' article is therefore guided by more traditional screen hierarchies which privilege narrative over mise-en-scene. Other studies of classical cinema and costume also work from this assumption; including Sarah Berry's Screen Style, Sue Harper's 'Historical Pleasures: Gainsborough Costume Melodrama' and Pam Cook's Fashioning the Nation.⁸⁴ In addition, subsequent inquiries into the function of costume in contemporary cinema, such as Sarah Street's examination of The Talented Mr Ripley (1999) and The Matrix (1999) in her book Costume and Cinema and Peter Wollen's analysis of Prêt à Porter (1994) in his article 'Strike a Pose' are also structured by this understanding of costume and narrative.⁸⁵ While these studies have offered invaluable insights into the examination of film costume, I suggest throughout this thesis that accepting this screen hierarchy of narrative and costume can be debilitating for several reasons, particularly when considering onscreen fashion in the contemporary era. First, the analyses mentioned above function at a textual level, and throughout this thesis I suggest that this body of work has been limited by the wider conceptual and methodological problems of purely textual approaches - the most oft cited of these being the marginalisation of the audience, and the suggestion of a rather deterministic and homogenous reading of audience response. Within these previous studies of fashion and film, there has been a tendency to overlook the importance of the viewer and more general questions of reception, yet these issues seem integral when making assumptions about the way in which spectacle is *interpreted* in the text. The notion that spectacle 'disrupts' narrative can surely only be substantiated through reception studies, which requires analysis beyond the text itself.

Second, both Street and Wollen's analysis of contemporary cinema works on the assumption that costume still functions as a narrative aid, despite the fact that considerable social, cultural and political changes have affected every other aspect of film form since

⁸³ Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative', p. 193

⁸⁴ Sarah Berry, Screen Style, Pam Cook (1996) Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema, London: BFI, Sue Harper (1987) 'Historical Pleasures: Gainsborough Costume Melodrama' in Christine Gledhill (ed) Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film, London: BFI, pp. 167-196

⁸⁵ Street, Costume and Cinema, Peter Wollen (1995) 'Strike a Pose' Sight and Sound, 5:3, pp. 13-15

the classical period.⁸⁶ Indeed, it is often claimed that, effects of so-called postmodern culture, have greatly influenced both cinema and the fashion industry. Moreover, it has also been argued that the effects of this supposed cultural turn have equally affected television. However, I should note here that I approach the subject of postmodernity/postmodernism with caution, for as Dick Hebdige (among others) notes, ‘the postmodern’ has become a contemporary ‘buzz word’.⁸⁷ Moreover, as John Storey notes, ‘[i]t has so many different meanings, in so many different debates and discourses, that it is tempting to dismiss it and move on to something with more academic substance’.⁸⁸

These caveats notwithstanding, and while it does not form the lynchpin of this thesis, it would be foolhardy, as Wilson notes, not to recognise its role in ‘rescu[ing] the study of dress from its lowly status...[for it] has created - or at least *named* – a climate in which any cultural aesthetic object may be taken seriously’⁸⁹[emphasis in original]. In addition, postmodernism has been used as a lens through which to view contemporary consumer culture. Thus, two key features of postmodernism in particular have shaped both of these discourses: the supposed ‘emphasis of style over substance’ and ‘the breakdown of the distinction between high art and popular culture’.⁹⁰

Scholars are divided on these two particular subjects. While some view the increasingly blurred boundaries between high art and popular culture as potentially socially progressive (such as Angela McRobbie, Iain Chambers and Andreas Huyssen),⁹¹ Zygmunt Bauman considers the ‘flattening of hierarchies’ to be ‘commercial’, ‘shallow’ and in some way ‘immoral’.⁹² Similarly, the prioritisation of the visual also causes this polarisation of opinion. Indeed, while some seek to interrogate the political possibilities of this supposed shift, this particular aspect of postmodernism is often invoked in negative discussions of

⁸⁶ I am referring specifically to the emergence of ‘New Hollywood Cinema’ (which roughly spans 1967-1976) characterised by critics as ‘a period of intense formal and thematic innovation’ Peter Kramer (2005) The New Hollywood: From Bonnie and Clyde to Star Wars, London: Wallflower p. 2

⁸⁷ Dick Hebdige (2006) ‘Postmodernism and “The Other Side”’ in John Storey (ed) Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, p. 410

⁸⁸ John Storey (2006) ‘Introduction: Postmodernism’, in John Storey (ed) Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, p. 385

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Wilson (1992) ‘Fashion and the Post Modern Body’, in Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (eds) Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 6

⁹⁰ Dominic Strinati (1995) An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture, London: Routledge, p. 224

⁹¹ Angela McRobbie (1994) Postmodernism and Popular Culture, London: Routledge, Iain Chambers (1988) Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience, London: Routledge, Andreas Huyssen (1986) The Great Divide: Modernity, Mass Culture and Postmodernism, London: Macmillan

⁹² Zygmunt Bauman (1992) Intimations of Postmodernity, London: Routledge, p. 34

consumption, identity and media (as briefly discussed above), in which it is often claimed that style and image are privileged above all else.⁹³ For example, Mike Featherstone's work on postmodernism and consumer culture, explores the now familiar postmodern assumption that 'we are moving towards a society without fixed status groups in which the adoption of styles of life (manifest in choice of clothes, leisure activities, consumer goods, bodily dispositions) which are fixed to specific groups have been surpassed.'⁹⁴ Thus, he examines the ways in which this supposed shift could be perceived as a move towards an 'egalitarian' society (in which previous power structures no longer shape identity) or a move towards a 'flat', 'depthless' society. This, he argues, raises significant questions such as 'can taste still be adequately "read", socially recognized and mapped onto class structure'? Does taste still "classify the classifier"?⁹⁵

It is important to note here, that television has been afforded an important role within debates about postmodernity and identity. Indeed, as Kellner notes elsewhere, the supposed shift toward an increasingly fragmented identity has resulted in television becoming central to the process of providing viewers with a meaningful sense of self. In addition, it has been claimed, that the broader debates regarding the postmodern preoccupation with 'image culture' are thought to have impacted upon television texts themselves. In his analysis of US TV show Miami Vice, Kellner argues that a common claim is, that in the postmodern era, the 'television *image* often decentres the importance of narrative [emphasis in original].'⁹⁶

Therefore, it could be said that this apparent cultural turn, has at most dismantled, or at the very least problematised, those hierarchies which privilege narrative over costume - that allows onscreen fashion some degree of autonomy. Stella Bruzzi's Undressing Cinema is one of the few studies which seeks to examine film costume as 'discourse not wholly dependent on the structures of narrative, and character for signification.'⁹⁷ Her case studies include films released in the 1980s and 1990s and demonstrate an alternative agenda with

⁹³ See Todd Gitlin (1987) Watching Television, New York: Pantheon and Lawrence Grossberg (1987) 'The In-Difference of Television', Screen 28:2 pp. 28-46

⁹⁴ Featherstone, 'Lifestyle and Consumer Culture', p. 93

⁹⁵ Featherstone, 'Lifestyle and Consumer Culture', p. 93

⁹⁶ Douglas Kellner (1995) Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern, London & New York: Routledge, p. 235

⁹⁷ Stella Bruzzi (1997) Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies, London & New York: Routledge, p. xvi

regard to their use of costume. However, she again approaches film costume from a primarily textual perspective.

Methodological Approaches to Fashion Television

Historically, television scholars have exercised a more cautious attitude toward purely textual approaches than film scholars. Emerging as a field in its own right in the 1970s, television studies initially adopted a more sociological approach; focussing primarily on the ‘effects’ of television rather than the close aesthetic analysis of television ‘texts’.⁹⁸ Indeed, the very concept of the television text, as scholars Ellis and Williams have demonstrated, is difficult to isolate and as Charlotte Brunsdon argues, this led to a lack of textual analysis within television studies. This is not to suggest that textual analysis was entirely evacuated from television studies, but rather that it has not historically been at its centre. In her article ‘Audience and Text’, Brunsdon posits that while television studies has traditionally had a focus on the audience it is important to ‘retain a notion of the television text’.⁹⁹ A recent body of work adopts Brunsdon’s perspective, and has begun to (re)introduce textual analysis into television studies in order to critically analyse television aesthetics. Scholars including Sarah Cardwell, Glen Creeber and Jason Jacobs have recently published articles which call for a renewed interest in textual analysis in order to establish television as a ‘legitimate’ art form.¹⁰⁰ Unsurprisingly, this development is often been linked with debates about ‘quality TV’.¹⁰¹ These studies also acknowledge the limitations of textual analysis insofar as they seek to offer less prescriptive accounts of particular programmes. According to Creeber, in his article ‘The Joy of Text?: Television and Textual Analysis’, acknowledging the limitations of purely textual approaches is essential, for ‘[i]f textual analysis is to survive into the future, then it (like all methodologies) must learn from past mistakes’.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ John Ellis (1992) Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video 2nd edn, London: Routledge, Raymond Williams (2003) [1975] Television: Technology and Cultural Form, London: Routledge

⁹⁹ Charlotte Brunsdon (1989) ‘Text and Audience’, in Ellen Seiter (eds) Remote Control: Television Audiences and Cultural Power, London: Routledge, p. 125

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Cardwell (2006) ‘Television Aesthetics’ Critical Studies in Television, 1:1 pp 72-80, Glen Creeber (2006) ‘The Joy of Text: Television and Textual Analysis’, Critical Studies in Television, 1:1 pp. 81-88, Jason Jacobs (2001) ‘Issues of Judgement and Value in Television Studies,’ International Journal of Cultural Studies, 4:4

¹⁰¹ See Sarah Cardwell (2007) ‘Is Quality Television Any Good? Generic Distinctions, Evaluations and the Troubling Matter of Critical Judgement’ in Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (eds) Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond, London & New York: I.B. Tauris pp.19-35

¹⁰² Creeber, ‘The Joy of Text’, p. 85

As previously mentioned, the most oft-cited criticism of textual analysis is that it can only provide *one* possible reading of a text, and as Creeber illustrates ‘if audiences can read a text in a number of ways then what is the validity and relevance of one textual interpretation?’¹⁰³ Furthermore, he suggests that ‘[t]extual analysis on its own is rarely enough, but when it combines with the wider contextual or ‘extra- textual nature of the subject it can still offer insight and inspiration.’¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Brunsdon’s article also demonstrates the importance of contextual readings as she suggests that ‘we have to accept the potentially infinite number/flow of textual sites’¹⁰⁵ in order to ‘usefully learn from the practices of television itself.’¹⁰⁶

It is pertinent to note here that the debate over the relationship between a text and its extra-textual circulation has equally been waged in the context of genre studies. In particular, Jason Mittell’s work argues that media scholars traditionally considered ‘genre primarily as a textual attribute’,¹⁰⁷ which often produces a vague and ultimately reductive understanding of genre. Instead, he suggests that ‘we need to look beyond the text as the locus for genres and instead locate genres within the complex interrelations among texts, industries, audiences and historical contexts’.¹⁰⁸ He claims:

we should gather as many diverse enunciations of [a] [...] genre from the widest possible range of sources, including corporate documents, press reviews and commentaries, trade journal accounts, parodies, regulatory policies, audience practices, production manuals, other media representations, advertisements and the texts themselves.¹⁰⁹

This approach, I argue, is useful for this thesis because like genre, costume articulated as fashion exists in a framework of discourses that can be located beyond the text. Indeed, reports in the popular press reveal that fashion programming is increasingly reliant on fashion to attract viewers and as such, magazine articles, internet blogs and websites contribute to promoting onscreen fashion outside of the text and can, as Klinger (1991) argues, affect the reception of the text. Klinger claims that the filmic text operates to

¹⁰³ Creeber, ‘The Joy of Text?’, 82

¹⁰⁴ Creeber, ‘The Joy of Text?’, 84

¹⁰⁵ Brunsdon, ‘Text and Audience’, p125

¹⁰⁶ Brunsdon, ‘Text and Audience’, p125

¹⁰⁷ Jason Mittell (2001) ‘A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory’, *Cinema Journal*, 40:3, p.5

¹⁰⁸ Mittell, ‘A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory’, p. 7

¹⁰⁹ Mittell, ‘A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory’, p. 9

encourage the viewer to call upon information obtained from extra-textual material and at times digress from the unfolding action onscreen. She writes:

A host of promotional forms such as media stories about the stars, the director and the making of the film, which arm the spectator with background information [...] fall into relation with moments of the film being screened.¹¹⁰

While Klinger's concept of digression is discussed with regard to cinema, it demonstrates the value of examining extra-textual material and the way in which it offers productive insights into the spectator-text relationship, which is, of course, integral to contemporary television viewing practices. Seeking to contribute to this body of work, my own interrogation of onscreen fashion and television acknowledges the importance of the television text and its relationship to various intertexts. It is important to note here that surveying actual audience response would also be a valuable method of analysis, especially given the fact that it has been claimed that costume/fashion is a site of great audience pleasure. Moreover, I believe a rigorous examination of the audiences of fashion programming would be a logical continuation of this project and would warrant a study of equal length. Thus, I see this thesis as a crucial precursory examination which seeks to map out some of the central themes of fashion programming and identify some of the areas which an audience study may examine.

For the purpose of this thesis, I seek to examine not only specific examples of fashion programming, but also the production context through the analysis of trade press and also the wider contextual apparatus in the form of celebrity inter-texts. In order to do so I adopt a triangulated approach to the study of fashion programming. In sociological terms triangulation involves the application of three different research methods to a particular project. The purpose of this is to off-set the limitations of one research method by providing the different perspective offered by another method. Traditionally, this involves the use of qualitative research that is 'cross-checked'¹¹¹ against results obtained using quantitative methods. This, it has been claimed, enhances the reliability of conclusions.¹¹² Alternatively, in her classic study, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular

¹¹⁰ Barbara Klinger (1991) 'Digressions at the Cinema: Commodification and Reception in Mass Culture' in James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger (eds) Modernity and Mass Culture, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 119

¹¹¹ Alan Bryman (2010) 'Quantitative vs. Qualitative Methods?' in Antony Giddens & Philip W. Sutton (eds) Sociology: Introductory Readings, London: Polity Press, p. 50

¹¹² Bryman, 'Quantitative vs. Qualitative Methods?', p. 51

Literature, Janice Radway employs three different methodologies in order to examine the production, textual construction and consumption of romance fiction. In other words, she examines romance fiction at the level of industry, text, and audience. In so doing, Radway is able to avoid the dangers of all three foci and demonstrates that whatever the ideological meanings that may be assumed through a study of the production contexts or textual construction of romance fiction, its use in women's everyday lives may contradict these meanings. In short, the triangulation of methodology helps to counterbalance the limitations of methodologies. As a result, I approach the function of onscreen fashion in contemporary US television from several different angles, a process that has not only helped overcome the limitations associated with specific methods but also helped to identify relationships between production, mediation and consumption that might have remained invisible without this triangulated approach.

The first section seeks to explore the economic, cultural and industrial factors which affect the use and function of fashion within fashion programming. In so doing, it examines the industry discourse which both structures and negotiates the ideological meaning of fashion programming. Thus, as I began this project I examined a series of trade press publications including, The Hollywood Reporter, Variety, Broadcast and Cable and WWD. During this process I was particularly drawn to a series of special issues of The Hollywood Reporter titled 'Fashion in Entertainment'. These supplements, which began in 1998, are published annually in October/November (following the new season premiers in the US) and offer both information about, and a commentary on, the creative and commercial dilemmas faced by both the fashion industry and screen industries (film and television) as a result of their union. The importance of The Hollywood Reporter as an industry publication is demonstrated by its readership,¹¹³ and the 'Fashion in Entertainment' special issues proved essential as they provide a particular way of focusing this project. As with The Hollywood Reporter, the special issues address industry professionals, however it is clear from the content that this supplement is aimed primarily at the television and advertising industries. For example, each special edition contains a series of articles addressing the central debates/concerns engendered by the emergence of fashion programming (these articles focus on testimonies of particular costume/fashion designers, screenwriters and

¹¹³ The Hollywood Reporter is the longest running daily trade publication and according to The New York Times, has a reported circulation of 21619 readers
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940DEEDF1530F934A3575BC0A96E948260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all> (accessed 20/12/10)

filmmakers) coupled with numerous whole page print advertisements for certain designers which feature established film and television actors as models (e.g. a recurring advertisement for Anne Klein uses TV and film actresses; Bebe Neuwirth and Michelle Yeoh). Thus, while it is important to remember that the information presented within the supplements is tailored to a particular audience (and therefore the content is specifically shaped by this advertorial discourse), it is also the case that this publication remains a useful source for examining the intersection between the intentions of costume designers and the relationship between potential consumers, the shows and the wider fashion market.

The annual special issues enable me to examine how the anxieties regarding the creative/commercial function of fashion programming are consolidated/ change over time. Moreover, the publications offer 'snap shots' of the industrial, cultural and economic factors which shape the discourse surrounding fashion programming; and as such, they offer a clearer picture of the changes/reactions to specific concerns than a survey of daily/weekly publications would allow. In other words, the differences in attitudes towards fashion television are more marked and easier to identify than if one were to examine the more incremental shifts which slowly manifest in a daily/weekly trade publication. Equally, it allows me to examine the broader reach of the fashion industry within screen media (i.e. film and television) as it is important to acknowledge that the recent trend of fashion programming is not viewed, within industry or popular press discourses, as an isolated (and purely televisual) phenomenon. The Hollywood Reporter's investment in all forms of screen entertainment offers an exploration of contemporary fashion television within an historical and cross-media context. For example, one of the central debates within the trade press, which is examined in the first section of this thesis, is the concern that television is not an appropriate medium for the exhibition of high fashion which, it is claimed, should only be reserved for the more prestigious medium of cinema. Thus, had I specifically examined television trade press, these anxieties may not have been exposed.

Second, I include close textual analysis of specific episodes of my three case studies. This includes a kind of semiotic analysis insofar as I seek to examine the precise ways in which onscreen fashion operates as a system of codes which require 'decoding'. However, more specifically, this focus of my analysis is on the relationship between fashion, character and narrative. In other words, this section concerns itself with the precise ways in which the narratives focus on the relationship between character and fashion, and how, to some

extent, the characters are defined by their relationship to consumption. This thesis argues that one of the defining characteristics of fashion programming is the way in which their narratives deal with individuals' relationship to consumption. In particular, the shows are concerned with moral dilemmas about fashion which motivate the narrative. Thus, the characters each adopt a different position on appropriate/inappropriate consumption which allows the narrative to work through these moral dilemmas. In this sense, onscreen fashion in contemporary fashion programming proves a troubling case study for previous academic approaches to fashion and costume which have hitherto presented fashion as either expressive of narrative or excessive and distracting, precisely because it is neither. As this section seeks to demonstrate, the relationship between onscreen fashion, narrative and character is thus much more complex than previous studies of costume and cinema would suggest.

Finally, the thesis examines the relationship between fashion television and celebrity culture. As the content of The Hollywood Reporter and WWD make clear, the fashion industry and celebrity culture have developed an increasingly complex, symbiotic relationship and this has industrial, cultural and aesthetic implications for fashion television. In order to assess this relationship, this final section examines three stars of fashion television (SJP, Adam Brody and America Ferrera). In so doing, I am able to examine the ways in which these shows engage with the wider fashion market. In addition, I suggest that by examining the representation of the celebrity image in fashion and celebrity magazines one is offered an insight into the desired role of viewers as consumers. For example, it is claimed that 'stars articulate what it is to be human in contemporary society',¹¹⁴ thus it could be argued that the use of the celebrity image within fashion magazines can articulate what it is to be *consumers of fashion* in contemporary society. In order to interrogate the celebrity image and its potential functions for consumers, I explore a selection of texts designed to attract specific subsections of the public. These include; Harper's Bazaar, People, Glamour, Nylon Guys, Teen Vogue, Elle Girl, GQ and Marie Claire. In so doing, I am able to examine the precise ways in which the celebrity images are constructed to address different genders, social classes, and ages as potential fashion consumers.

¹¹⁴ Richard Dyer (1987) Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars in Society, London: BFI, p. 10

Of course, it could be argued that this approach is simply textual analysis insofar each of these inter-texts require ‘interpretation’. However, the crucial difference lies in the way in which each text has a specific purpose/readership and therefore reveals an alternative set of concerns and reflections on different aspects of the television text.¹¹⁵ As such, I seek to examine these discourses in relation to one another in order to avoid a textually determinist reading. Moreover, while it could also be argued that this is a relatively small body of texts under scrutiny, I believe that the sample provides adequate representation of the key issues and debates which preoccupy the phenomenon of fashion programming. For example, while the first section on industry discourse is primarily reliant on one particular trade publication, the special issues prove invaluable as they collate a large body of disparate information from a range of industry professionals. Furthermore, by concentrating specifically on one trade press I am able to offer a more rigorous analysis and therefore reveal a series of important issues and concerns which resonate in industry discourse that may have not been apparent from a more surface examination of a wider range of sources.

Similarly, the three case studies were selected as representative of fashion programming for a variety of reasons. Firstly, as previously discussed, they are considered in the press to be ‘fashion programming’. Second, each of these shows also had/have significant cultural resonance and commercial success. Sex and the City has become canonised both in academic discourse¹¹⁶ and the popular press. Moreover, throughout its six season run the show achieved consistently high audience ratings. Similarly, The O.C., although not as successful (in terms of continued audience figures) as Sex and the City, proved to be one of the most critically acclaimed teen dramas, earning a prime time spot in both the US and UK. Furthermore, The O.C. is also considered to be the inspiration for the emergence of ‘fashion-forward’ primetime teen dramas which followed after its cancellation in 2006. These include Gossip Girl (2007-),¹¹⁷ 90210 (2009), Melrose Place (2009) and Privileged (2008). Finally Ugly Betty was also deemed a success by its local audience figures (a reported 16.1 million US viewers watched the pilot episode in 2006) and its global success:

¹¹⁵ Moreover, it should also be noted that throughout the remainder of the thesis, I will be referring to textual analysis as specifically programme analysis.

¹¹⁶ Deborah Jermyn’s book on Sex and the City, was published as a part of the TV Milestones Collection and in her introduction, she acknowledges the cultural impact the show has had on (predominantly) female audiences, claiming ‘*Sex and the City* has earned its right to considered landmark [television]’. (p. 4)

¹¹⁷ The creator of The O.C. Josh Schwartz is also the creator of Gossip Girl.

airing in over 15 countries. However, this is not to suggest that I am determining their success by ratings alone, but also a cursory glance at the numerous fan sites dedicated to each show demonstrates the significant audience engagement enjoyed by the programmes.¹¹⁸ In addition, each television show is reported to have had a considerable impact on the fashion industry and fashion trends. For example *Sex and the City*, is considered responsible for introducing ‘Manolo Blahnik’ as a household name and igniting a series of trends (including the nameplate necklace, flower pins and ‘short shorts’).¹¹⁹ Similarly *The O.C.* is thought to have influenced the increase in sales of the Chanel padded handbag. *Ugly Betty*’s impact on the fashion industry is perhaps less explicit, however its multiple designer guest stars including Isaac Mizrahi, Mark Badgley and James Mischka and Vera Wang, it is suggested, has resulted in *haute couture* fashion designers becoming ‘household’ names.¹²⁰

Using the above case studies, I seek to establish precisely how television fashion operates at the level of industry, text and celebrity intertexts and how it is designed to be understood in the contemporary media climate. Specifically, this project aims to answer several research questions which I have identified as key in understanding fashion in a framework of discourses. These are: first, how has this emergence of fashion programming been understood within industry discourse? Second, how does fashion operate on a textual level within fashion programming – e.g. does it function as spectacle, forward narrative and/or characterisation? Third, how has the construction of specific television stars or personalities worked to shape or consolidate these developments within fashion programming? Finally how useful is existing scholarship on costume and cinema in the study of fashion and television, and how might we revise certain aspects in order to take into account the specificity of television form? In answering these key questions, I aim to build a foundation upon which we might begin to understand the cultural function and social uses of costume within a televisual context.

¹¹⁸ The following are examples of fan forums which discuss fashion and remain active after the cancellation of the shows: <http://www.hbo.com/sex-and-the-city/index.html#/sex-and-the-city/talk/forums/item.html/eNrjcmBOYCSUz89JccxLzKksyUwOSExP9UvMTdUsy0xJzYeJOufnlRWIDnSyWWZqbYGhkYm6ekGBmpGrmYJhmlASIDA6MUIJVkaAmiDAwME81MTFJTDJIT2RjZGdkZGQEpXx6Y> (last accessed 9/6/10), <http://www.theocshow.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=18> (last accessed 9/6/10) <http://abc.go.com/shows/ugly-betty/discuss?cat=30895&tid=857595&tsn=1> (last accessed 9/6/10)

¹¹⁹ See ‘The Ripple Effect’ in Sohn, *Kiss and Tell*, p.158

¹²⁰ Ann Oldenburg (2006) ‘TV Brings High Fashion Down to the Everyday’ *USA Today* http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2006-07-11-fashion-tv_x.htm (accessed 06/10/09)

The first section examines, from an industrial perspective, the relationship between fashion and television as narrated in the trade press. Leading on from the scholarship outlined above, I examine the ways in which the trade publication The Hollywood Reporter understands the relationship between onscreen costume in film and television. The section is divided into three chapters – each chapter focuses on a specific theme present in the trade discourse. The central aims of the first chapter are to specify the precise economic, cultural and industrial factors which affect the use of costume in both forms of screen entertainment (film and television), in order to revise existing work on onscreen fashion so that it acknowledges the specificities of television form. In so doing, this chapter seeks to highlight the concerns regarding the cultural value of fashion programming which circulate within the trade press. The second chapter examines the precise roles of the industry practitioners (of both film and television) in the contemporary period, highlighting some of the tensions which structure attitudes present within the industry regarding the use of sourced clothing in the contemporary television series. The final chapter of this section concentrates on the relationship between the fashion industry and television celebrity, particularly the economic motivations behind the relationship. Moreover, the available testimonies of industry professionals within the trade discourse allow me to demonstrate some of the ways in which fashion is intended to be read onscreen.

The second section employs a different approach. As previously stated, this thesis seeks to contribute to the body of work which focuses on television aesthetics, and thus, this section uses programme analysis and elements of reception studies in order to demonstrate the ways in which fashion might be read onscreen. In particular, this chapter seeks to examine precisely how the case studies above endeavour to offset concerns which arose with regard to the cultural value of fashion programming. In addition, I demonstrate how each programme employs key narrative tropes associated with the woman's film, such as makeovers and shopping scenes (designed to address the viewer as a consumer), which I suggest is central to the legitimisation process. Moreover, as with the women's films of the 1940s, I argue that each of these texts educates/allows viewers to practice sophisticated consumer competences in *reading* fashion. As such, this section draws on a body of work regarding consumer culture (this includes debates regarding its relationship to postmodernism). That said, it is important to note that this thesis is *not* a study of consumer

culture and does not seek to revise previous studies.¹²¹ Rather, I use existing work in order to enrich my analysis of the three case studies and situate it within the relevant debates. Indeed, given the pervasiveness of the discourses regarding postmodernism, fashion and identity, it is possible that the case studies examined here, (the narratives of which are preoccupied with fashion and consumer culture) are informed by, or in some way a response to, these debates.

Using a selection of specific episodes of the three chosen case studies,¹²² each chapter demonstrates how fashion can operate in different ways within a show still labelled by the press as ‘fashion programming’. The first chapter uses Sex and the City as a lens through which to re-examine traditional notions of ‘spectacle’ and ‘narrative’. The onscreen fashion in Sex and the City is often the subject of popular and academic debates about the relationship between fashion and narrative, and how the show might subvert more traditional hierarchies. This chapter then, examines how Sex and the City uses fashion in order to comment on the narrative insofar as it uses fashion as a metaphor – particularly within ‘shopping scenes’, which I argue are a key narrative trope of the show.

The next chapter also uses textual analysis in order to demonstrate how fashion is used within the teen drama The O.C.. This chapter focuses specifically on characterisation and the relationship between fashion and identity. Drawing on existing literature on fashion theory and cultural identity, this chapter argues that The O.C. uses fashion to aid characterisation, while simultaneously using the narrative to interrogate discourses of fashion and identity in the so-called postmodern landscape. This chapter therefore applies/reassesses some of the debates outlined here with regard to fashion practices, identity and the ‘active/passive’ dichotomy. In particular, I examine contemporary concerns regarding ‘appropriate’ dress and the material construction of identity with regard to the male characters.

The final chapter in this section again refers back to the relationship between costume and narrative and the longstanding assumption that fashion can be viewed as expressive of identity or as ‘excessive’. Here, I continue to explore the relationship between fashion and identity, with a specific focus on ethnicity. In addition, I interrogate how a television

¹²¹ Thus, while I am keen not to overstate the use-value of postmodernism as a lens through which to view contemporary consumer culture, my primary concern within this thesis is the way in which contemporary discourses and debates may influence/inform contemporary fashion programming.

¹²² See p. 88 for a discussion of the reasoning behind the selection of specific episodes for analysis.

show's generic identity (in this case the sitcom) shapes its use of fashion. In the case of Ugly Betty, I argue that the show uses fashion to create elements of comedy and juxtaposes these with drama in order to educate viewers in fashion and beauty practices. In so doing, the show displays complex and contradictory attitudes towards the fashion industry - lampooning elitist and shallow attitudes of the industry, while simultaneously exposing a more worthwhile understanding of fashion as 'performance art'.

The final section of the thesis develops debates initiated in the previous section. Specifically, this section expands upon the argument that each case study uses fashion to perform a *pedagogical* function, teaching audiences about fashion and consumption practices. Therefore, I examine the pedagogical role of the television celebrity and their position as a fashion icon. Again, the section is divided into three chapters each focusing on a particular television actor from each of the three case texts. The first chapter in this section traces the construction of Sarah Jessica Parker's (SJP) star image in US celebrity magazine People from 1998- 2004 and high-end fashion magazine, Harper's Bazaar. In particular, I argue that SJP's function as a 'cultural intermediary' is constructed around discourses of class.¹²³ I demonstrate how SJP's image is used to reinforce class boundaries in a landscape which has supposedly de-stabilised the meanings of cultural identities.

Building upon this work, the second chapter examines how the construction/circulation of Adam Brody's star image within celebrity and fashion magazines serves to reinforce and rearticulate masculine identities which are thought to have become increasingly fragmented and unstable in the contemporary period. Drawing on studies by Tim Edwards and Frank Mort on masculinity and consumption,¹²⁴ I demonstrate how the circulation of Adam Brody's star image in both men and women's fashion magazines promotes specific notions of heterosexual masculinity. This, I suggest, is due to the fact that Brody's position as male teen star complicates his role as fashion icon, which is traditionally constructed and affirmed within 'feminine' cultural texts (fashion and celebrity magazines).

The final chapter examines America Ferrera's position as an 'unlikely' fashion icon. Like her character in Ugly Betty, Ferrera's physicality and ethnicity fall outside of the dominant

¹²³ See introduction to section for a more detailed definition and summary of key debates.

¹²⁴ Tim Edwards (1997) Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society, London: Cassell, Frank Mort (1988) "'Boys Own?' Masculinity, Style and Popular Culture', in Rowena Chapman and Jonathon Rutherford (eds) Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity, London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, pp. 193- 225

ideologies of western beauty associated with the elite fashion industry. However the circulation of her star image in US celebrity magazine People and US fashion magazine Glamour construct Ferrera's 'otherness' as a marker of authenticity and 'ordinariness' within celebrity discourse. This, I argue, allows her to secure a position as a cultural intermediary. In addition, this chapter argues that Ferrera's star image is situated within a makeover narrative which functions as an alternative version of the 'success myth' thereby cementing her position as television star. Furthermore, I also suggest that the makeover narrative could be viewed as an attempt to render her ethnicity 'safe' for potential readers who are often constructed, at a textual level, as white.¹²⁵

Finally, an ongoing and crucial theme within this project is the rejection of the notion that fashion, as it is presented within these texts, is 'trivial'. Throughout this thesis, I endeavour to foreground the social and cultural significance of onscreen fashion in its televisual context in an attempt to ignite a critical interest in the study of television costume.

¹²⁵ The success myth was conceptualised by Dyer in his book Stars.

Section One

The Place of Fashion Television: Industry Discourse and the Search for Cultural Legitimacy

This section examines the trade discourse surrounding the emergence of fashion programming. It is subdivided into three chapters and the focus of each chapter is organised in relation to the main discourses and debates highlighted in the trade papers; The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment and Women's Wear Daily (WWD). The chapters are arranged chronologically, insofar as each chapter examines a specific period in which these debates were mobilised (i.e. the first chapter will focus on the first three issues of the 'Fashion in Entertainment' special editions (1998-2000), the second chapter examines the 2001 and 2002 issues, and the final chapter examines the 2003-2006 issues).

Of course, while the analysis of trade press can deepen our understanding of the cultural and economic functions of fashion programming, it is necessary to acknowledge its limitations, as with any method. For example, it is important to note that trade papers serve as a *representation* of the industry, reliant on the available testimonies of industry professionals. Thus it is not possible to extract 'truths' about the period examined from this evidence. Rather, they offer a constructed/mediated account of the history.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the trade press can reveal an industrial narrative with regard to fashion programming, a narrative which has not been previously told. Moreover, The Hollywood Reporter in particular, offers a site in which fashion programming is centralised and examined through an industrial lens, and as such, it reveals useful insights into concerns regarding the cultural value of fashion and television which structure attitudes towards fashion programming. This section then, examines the ways in which the boundaries of 'legitimate' culture are negotiated so that fashion programming becomes a 'legitimisable' cultural form.¹²⁷ Thus, I use trade discourse to gain an understanding of precisely how the fashion and television industries benefitted from the symbiotic relationship and the anxieties which arose as a result of this union. In addition, I seek to highlight which programmes were identified as

¹²⁶ Of course, this is the also the case with empirical research.

¹²⁷ Bourdieu argues that some texts/cultural goods can be considered 'legitimisable' (often cited examples include jazz, photography and cinema). Thus, while these cultural texts are not considered a staple of 'legitimate culture' (in contrast to something like Opera, or high art), at times, they fall under the 'gaze' of legitimating authorities and can become respectable.

being significant, or ‘representative’ of this shift. In so doing, I seek to demonstrate the ways in which the emergence of fashion programming initially triggered concerns in the industry regarding television’s cultural status, which (as I shall demonstrate in later chapters) the texts and intertexts subsequently endeavour to offset.

The Hollywood Reporter began as a daily film trade paper, adding coverage of television in the 1950s and other media in the 1980s. The trade paper is now loosely categorised as a publication for the ‘entertainment industries’. For the purpose of this thesis, it is precisely The Hollywood Reporter’s investment in a range of media forms which interests me. From 1998 onwards, The Hollywood Reporter published an annual special edition, ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ which examines the ways in which mid to high- end fashion finds exposure in a variety of media including cinema, television and music video. These special editions provide a fascinating and unique commentary on the intersection between fashion and screen media, and also demonstrate how fashion programming is intended to be understood in an industrial context. In addition, as the issue is published annually, it is possible to trace developments of the relationship between fashion and television across a period of time (1998 and 2006).

WWD, created in 1910, began as a ‘trade rag’ before achieving an important and legitimate position within the fashion industry. Often referred to as ‘The Fashion Bible’, WWD’s mission statement claims that the trade publication is:

dedicated to providing a balance of timely, credible business news and key women's fashion trends to a dedicated readership. This readership includes retailers, designers, manufacturers, marketers, financiers, Wall Street analysts, international moguls, media executives, ad agencies, socialites and trend makers.¹²⁸

For the purpose of this thesis, WWD provides a revealing counterbalance to the film and television trade press insofar as it views some of the debates and discourses highlighted in The Hollywood Reporter from a different vantage point, i.e. that of the fashion industry.

¹²⁸ Anon, ‘Mission Statement’, www.wwd.com (accessed 15/2/10)

Chapter One

Fashion Programming and Cinema: Cultural Value and Canons

‘Art has to do with something totally *spirituelle*. It is a very remarkable, extraordinary thing. That is what art is and fashion isn’t. Fashion has to do with daily life’.¹²⁹

‘Art is art and fashion is an industry...art is above commerce, that art, for its own sake or for any other reason, is the big, important thing...Fashion is not art.’¹³⁰

In a 2008 issue of USA Today, journalist Ann Oldenburg claims that television is responsible for ‘bringing high fashion down to the everyday’.¹³¹ The article quotes Sarah Bailey, deputy editor in chief of Harper’s Bazaar, who maintains:

We can all thank Sex and the City for really giving TV audiences a fashion education. The first episode aired in 1998 and the show was groundbreaking for fashion in popular culture...what we’re seeing now [on television] is the evolution of that.¹³²

Implicit within Oldenburg’s article is the assumption that fashion (before the emergence of fashion television) was *not* everyday and that television, on the other hand *is*. That said, as Bailey notes, it is also apparent that television fulfils a useful aesthetic and cultural function insofar as it offers a ‘fashion education’.

Indeed, television is often considered to be connected to the ‘everyday’ and the domestic. In its infancy, television was considered a ‘popular’, ‘mass’ medium – denigrated by mass culture critics, and associated with the ‘trivial’ and the ‘feminine’. Similarly, as demonstrated in the introduction to this thesis, fashion, (with the exception of *haute couture*), has also been derided by mass culture critics who consider it to be the antithesis of ‘serious’ high culture. While there has been a noted shift towards their legitimization it is clear that this heritage continues to shape contemporary attitudes regarding both cultural industries.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that fashion programming occupies a complex position within contemporary value systems; given that, as Oldenburg suggests, it is both ‘everyday’ and *not* ‘everyday’. Moreover as Bailey suggests, fashion programming seeks

¹²⁹ Diana Vreeland interviewed by Lori Simmons Zelenko (12/6/81) in “Is Fashion Art?” American Artist, p. 88

¹³⁰ Michael Boodro (September, 1990) ‘Art and Fashion’, Art News, pp. 120-3

¹³¹ Ann Oldenburg (12/7/2006) ‘TV Brings High Fashion Down to the Everyday’ http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2006-07-11-fashion-tv_x.htm (accessed 26/06/2008)

¹³² Sarah Bailey cited in Oldenburg, ‘TV Brings High Fashion Down to the Everyday’

to train its audience in discrimination via a ‘fashion education.’ Therefore, it is surely more than banal and ‘pre-digested’ mass culture.¹³³ Indeed, as this chapter shall demonstrate, the ambiguity of fashion programming became a ‘problem’ within the trade papers, which detailed its emergence in the late 1990s, as it threatened to devalue the (recently acquired) artistic merit of screen media. Thus, I argue that the industry discourse seeks to deflect any criticisms that fashion programming was engineered solely for commercial reasons, and attempts to position it as ‘popular art’. It achieves this by situating recent examples of fashion programming within a romanticised version of the past in which the fashion and film industries, in the classical Hollywood era, enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship. In so doing The Hollywood Reporter seeks to legitimate its own content and position contemporary fashion programming as important and worthwhile. Therefore, the trade discourse reveals a set of complex tensions surrounding art, commerce and cultural value which structure attitudes towards contemporary fashion programming.

The following discussion seeks to clarify and expand the debates briefly sketched here, demonstrating how industrial shifts within both the television and fashion industry impact upon fashion programming’s bid for legitimacy. As I shall propose, the early editions of the ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ special issue practice ‘popular discrimination’ insofar as they seek to present film as the dominant medium in the exhibition of high fashion, and continue to perpetuate those prejudices surrounding television’s ‘low’ cultural status. I then highlight a shift within the trade press which acknowledges the synergistic relationship between the fashion and television industry. This shift, I argue, is subsequently situated within a much broader narrative, across both television and film history, in an attempt to legitimate contemporary fashion programming.

Industry Discourse and the Emergence of Fashion Programming

Despite the emergence of SATC and various other programmes with a narrative focus on fashion, the 1998 issue of The Hollywood Reporter’s ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ special edition suggests that cinema, as opposed to television, was the dominant medium for the exhibition of fashion. Of the eight articles printed in the inaugural issue of ‘Fashion in

¹³³ I use the term to describe the way in which Theodore Adorno considered audiences responses to be ‘predetermined rather than the result of a genuine interaction with the text’ – John Storey, drawing on Adorno in (1993) An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, London: Wheatsheaf, p. 61

Entertainment', one half page story details the use of fashion in television, the rest focus on fashion in film. The opening article 'Clothing the Deal' claims:

In the apparel industry, veteran brand builders have always known that tie-in opportunities can thrive wherever people wear clothes. Sports and music have long been exploited, but these days the focus is shifting to the film world where big-screen impact speaks louder than any other medium.¹³⁴

Inherent within this passage are a series of value judgements which structure the early trade discourse; specifically that film is a more 'spectacular' medium with the capacity to have a 'bigger impact' than television. These views arise from wider, historical prejudices surrounding the aesthetic functions of cinema and television. Indeed, these prejudices are indicative of the discriminations made between 'popular art' (in this case film) and 'mass art' (television) which are underpinned by discourses of gender (i.e. television's position as mass art because it is allegedly a 'feminine/feminizing' medium).¹³⁵ As Patrice Petro notes, this gendered distinction has long since been applied to television and film both within the academy and in popular discourse. She purports:

Given the tenacity of hierarchical gender opposition both in our culture and our theoretical discourses it is not surprising that debates over the place of television... should echo the opposition between activity and passivity when assigning value to television outside the domain of legitimate culture.¹³⁶

These gendered definitions of mass culture and 'art' are reinforced in Hall and Whannel's concept of 'popular art' which is viewed as 'engaging' and 'active', while 'mass art' is 'emotionally unrewarding' and 'passive'.¹³⁷ In addition, television's place outside of 'legitimate' culture is informed by more traditional value systems which are constructed in relation to the 'art vs. commerce' debate. As Pierre Bourdieu notes in The Field of Cultural Production:

the opposition between the 'commercial' and the 'non commercial' reappears everywhere. It is the generative principle of most of the judgments which, in

¹³⁴ Jean Penn (October 20-26, 1998) 'Clothing the Deal', The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue, p. S-3

¹³⁵ Deborah Jermyn (2006) 'Bringing out the * in You': SJP, Carrie Bradshaw and the Evolution of Television Stardom' in Su Holmes and Sean Redmond (eds) Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture, London: Routledge, p. 80

¹³⁶ Patrice Petro (Spring 1986) 'Mass Culture and the Feminine: The "Place" of Television in Film Studies' Cinema Journal, 25:3 p. 6

¹³⁷ Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel (1964) The Popular Arts, London: Hutchinson

theatre, cinema, painting or literature, claim to establish the frontier between what is and what is not art.¹³⁸

To be sure, mass culture is, for the most part, commercially driven, however, Hall and Whannel suggest that ‘popular art’ is that which risen above its mass culture origins.¹³⁹ Indeed, they draw a comparison between ‘popular art’ and ‘folk art’, insofar as, ‘[a]lthough [popular] art is no longer made by the people, it is still in a manner not applicable to the high arts, a popular art, for the people.’¹⁴⁰ In contrast, ‘mass art’ makes no attempt to disguise its commercial agenda.

These discourses resonate with the ‘Clothing the Deal’ article. While the article (somewhat begrudgingly) acknowledges fashion’s involvement in television, it is only mentioned briefly. It is suggested that television’s ‘low’ cultural status renders the medium unsuitable for the exhibition of high fashion. It reads:

These omnipresent fashion deals are not limited to feature films and the music world. For the most part status designer lines prefer the exposure of film to television; however, the fashion universe is no stranger to the small screen. Production companies with clout seem to get away with more, a phenomenon that product-placement specialists can’t help but applaud.¹⁴¹

The latter part of this comment, in particular, points to the commerciality of the union between the ‘ready-to-wear’ fashion and television industries.

The examples cited in the article (from which the passage above is taken) include the teen drama Dawson’s Creek (1998-2003) which collaborated with high street clothing label, J. Crew, (J. Crew provided the wardrobe for the four lead characters, who in turn modelled for the clothing company’s catalogue) and Ally McBeal (1997-2002) which forged a relationship with Calvin Klein. Both of these examples serve as representatives of an ‘appropriate’ relationship between the television and fashion industries. In both cases it is claimed that the shows and the designers sought the same demographic. However, it is important to note that these examples remain, in the 1998 issue, exceptional. Film is foregrounded as the ‘proper’ medium within which to exhibit high fashion. Indeed, it is also implied that the ‘everyday’ nature of the shows above provided a platform in which the designers could showcase ‘professional’ work wear in Ally McBeal and teen ‘outdoor’

¹³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu (1993) The Field of Cultural Production, London: Polity p.82

¹³⁹ Hall and Whannel, The Popular Arts

¹⁴⁰ Hall and Whannel, The Popular Arts, p. 59

¹⁴¹ Penn, ‘Clothing the Deal’, p. S-6

wear in the case of Dawson's Creek. This is perhaps most explicitly stated in the 'Designing Minds' article, which comprises of interviews with fashion designers about onscreen fashion. In this article, designer Bob Mackie acknowledges the 'everydayness' of television and its impact on fashion placement:

Times change. Seventh Avenue paid attention to those glamorous designs by Edith Head and Jean Louis and Orry Kelly for the stars of the past, but now a star like Calista Flockhart [from Ally McBeal] gives the audience an idea of what to wear to the office. And Angie Harmon, who plays the prosecutor on *Law & Order*, dresses in great tailored suits that can be an inspiration for its audience of women. The TV shows are more practical...¹⁴²

Despite the success of the examples featured in the trade press, it is precisely the 'everydayness' of television that The Hollywood Reporter views as a problem. Within the trade press, it is suggested that this notion of 'everydayness', and consequent associations with 'mass culture', prevent 'status designer lines' from seeking exposure in television. However, subsequent issues of 'Fashion in Entertainment', which no longer deny the pervasiveness of fashion programming, suggest that it is TV's connection to the 'everyday' (often claimed to be lacking with regard to cinema) that proves to be beneficial, not only in the exhibition of the 'practical' everyday wear, but also (somewhat paradoxically) with regard to high fashion. This is in part due to changes within the fashion industry, which are acknowledged in the 2000 edition of 'Fashion in Entertainment'. Furthermore, these industrial changes also contribute to the construction of value systems which structure contemporary attitudes towards fashion programming.

The 'Democratisation' of Fashion: Fashion, Fashion Programming and Cultural Value

In the article 'Off the Rack & Onto the Screen' it is claimed that:

[f]ashion programming is... boosted by another sea change in the industry: Designers are mass marketing their fashions like never before - with Armani and Prada in department stores for example – and they realize [sic] the best way to reach the greatest number of potential consumers is through television.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Bob Mackie (October 20-26, 1998) 'Clothing the Deal'. The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue p. S-21

¹⁴³ Randee Dawn (October 31 November 6, 2000) 'Off the Rack & Onto the Screen', The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment: Special Issue, p.S-3

To be sure, in the late 1990s, the fashion industry did witness an increase in diffuse designer lines. These ready to wear lines were created in order to finance, and thereby ensure the survival of, *haute couture* (which was expensive to custom make). This movement prompted concerns within the fashion industry regarding *haute couture*'s symbolic value – insofar as designers (the producers of symbolic value) were attaching their names to the cheaper mass produced garments. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the designer was, and for the most part still is, crucial to maintaining the symbolic value of fashion.

These concerns are not new - whenever an industrial, cultural or economic shift occurs within the industry there are claims that a 'democratisation of fashion' is occurring, which is seen as 'endangering' the value of high fashion. To put this simply, the phrase 'democratisation of fashion' is employed within popular rhetoric whenever a shift occurs which results in fashion becoming in some way accessible to, or influenced by, the 'masses'. It was first applied to industrial shifts in the late 19th century, specifically the emergence of ready cut patterns which enabled the masses to (re)create garments from patterns used by skilled dressmakers. In particular, it was the print media which offered paper patterns to an 'impersonal and dispersed audience',¹⁴⁴ that allowed for a range of social classes to participate in fashion practices. Similarly, the emergence of 'ready to wear' fashion in the twentieth century also resulted in fashion becoming more accessible to all social classes. The 'ready to wear' lines replicated and mass produced high fashion designs which could be sold at lower prices to the general public.

As with the emergence of 'ready-to-wear' fashion, the increase in designer diffusion lines engineers the *widespread* adoption of designer garments. Both of these examples raised concerns regarding the symbolic and cultural value of *haute couture* which relies on its exclusivity in order to justify its high price. However, these concerns were, and continue to be managed by 'the fashion system' which, as Kawamura explains, 'creates symbolic boundaries between what is and what is not fashion and also determines what the legitimate taste is'.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, as fashion scholars including Diana Crane, Ellen Leopold,

¹⁴⁴ Margaret Walsh (1979) 'The Democratization of Fashion: The Emergence of the Women's Dress Pattern Industry', *Journal of American History*, 6:2, p. 301

¹⁴⁵ Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, p. 73

Valerie Steele and Kawamura have noted, the ‘fashion system’ relies upon these tensions in order to ensure its survival.¹⁴⁶

In her examination of the ‘Fashion System’, Leopold describes how the fashion industry is often understood as ‘being in the grip of forces beyond their control... [this is] based on the view that “it is fashion that makes the industry rather than the industry that makes the fashion.”’¹⁴⁷ This belief contributes to the mythology surrounding the fashion industry. In other words, fashion must be understood as a ‘cultural phenomenon’ that cannot be forecast. Indeed, this ‘surprise’ element is considered to be a characteristic of legitimate ‘art’ – i.e. it is an object that is unpredictably born out of moments of ‘inspiration’.

The work of the scholars cited above, however, seeks to ‘demystify’ the fashion system, exposing the complex machinations which construct this myth. Indeed, the concerns which arose as a result of the creation of off-the-rack diffusion brands are perpetuated by the fashion industry. These concerns have a useful function for the industry insofar as they encourage a form of ‘discrimination’ by its sophisticated consumers. In so doing, the fashion industry is able to secure the demand for custom made gowns insofar as they were ‘presented as one-off style “creations” that enhanced the originality and individuality of the consumer in a world of increasingly mass-produced goods’.¹⁴⁸ The exposure of off-the-rack clothing on television was also considered to contribute to the ‘democratisation’ of fashion, given that it would allow designers to reach a wider audience. As such, similar tensions arose regarding the relationship between fashion and television and these are present within the television discourse.

The economic gains for the television industry are made apparent within the trade press. For example, the constraints imposed upon television at the level of production make the placement of fashion indispensable, insofar as designers often donate garments to be included in the show, thereby cutting wardrobe costs significantly. Moreover, the demanding shooting schedules result in costume designers rarely having the time to create and fit garments for an entire cast. As Ally McBeal costume designer Rachael Stanley

¹⁴⁶ Diana Crane (2001) Fashion and its Social Agenda: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Ellen Leopold, (1992) ‘The Manufacture of the Fashion System’ in Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (eds) Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader, London: Pandora, Valerie Steele (1998) Paris Fashion: A Cultural History, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press and Kawamura, Fashion-ology

¹⁴⁷ Leopold, ‘The Manufacture of the Fashion System’, p. 113

¹⁴⁸ Leopold, ‘The Manufacture of the Fashion System’, p.109

remarks in the 'Clothing the Deal' article, 'Last week I had seven days to prep, I did 85 outfits from head to toe. We rely heavily on our relationship with stores and designers'.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, the short amount of time between shooting and broadcasting also means that television can keep up to date with seasonal trends, which as fashion and film historians have argued, proved problematic for film makers in the classical era whose projects could potentially be shelved for years.¹⁵⁰ This allows fashion designers the opportunity to exhibit their new designs to potential consumer audiences. Moreover, fashion placement, and the ability to keep up to date with trends, is useful with regard to the realism of television.

Despite these economic gains, concerns were raised that the programming would be unable to achieve a 'popular art' status given the commercial nature of the relationship between the television and fashion industries. These concerns resonate with the discourses in the trade press which seeks to present the emergence of fashion programming as worthwhile and not wholly motivated by economic gain. As Jane Feuer demonstrates in her book Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism, '[s]ince television was not originally conceptualized as an art form at all, TV programs needed to be constructed as artistic artifacts. This was the function of "art discourses"'.¹⁵¹ She claims "'art discourse"...is culturally constructed by social groups who have the power to define aesthetic value for their times.'¹⁵² In order to construct television as an 'artistic artifact', the trade press seeks to 'define aesthetic value for the times' and it situates this emergence of fashion programming within a broader and more culturally 'legitimate' history of cinema and fashion fusion. In so doing, contemporary fashion programming gains greater cultural value, which allows it 'go up the cultural escalator'.¹⁵³

As with television, fashion has never truly achieved a legitimate status as 'art' in wider discourses. Fashion, as Bourdieu notes, 'is a very prestigious subject in the sociological tradition, at the same time as being apparently rather frivolous'.¹⁵⁴ Within the field of fashion theory numerous articles argue for fashion to be considered 'legitimate' art. However, the popular consensus, as demonstrated by Vreeland's assertion cited at the

¹⁴⁹ Rachael Stanley cited in Penn 'Clothing the Deal', p.S-25

¹⁵⁰ In 'How Dress Tells the Woman's Story', Gaines demonstrates how filmmakers were told not to use fashionable designs as it could date the film given the extended period between production and release.

¹⁵¹ Jane Feuer (1996) Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism, London: BFI, p. 82

¹⁵² Feuer, Seeing Through the Eighties, p. 82

¹⁵³ Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing the Popular', p. 234

¹⁵⁴ Pierre Bourdieu (1993) '*Haute couture* and Haute Culture' in Sociology in Question London: Sage p.185

opening of this chapter, is that fashion is not art. For Vreeland it is fashion's association with 'daily life' which prevents its legitimization. However, this is not to suggest, as Bourdieu posits, that fashion, particularly high fashion, is not 'serious'. Indeed, there are concerns raised within the fashion trade press that television's low cultural status poses a threat to the cultural value of fashion. As previously discussed, fashion programming threatened the exclusivity of *haute couture* to a degree, insofar as it offered 'visual' access to high fashion and, as this thesis argues, knowledge of the cultural competences necessary to participate in fashion and consumption practices. Significantly, these same criticisms were levelled at a series of films in the classical era.

'The Ultimate Symbiosis'?: Fashion and Classical Film

In Gaines and Herzog's edited collection *Fabrications*, essays by Charles Eckert, Gaines and Herzog offer historical accounts of the relationship between the fashion and film industries in the silent and classical eras.¹⁵⁵ In his well known essay 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window'¹⁵⁶, Eckert claims that 'If one walked into New York's largest department stores toward the end of 1929 one could find abundant evidence of penetration of Hollywood fashions.'¹⁵⁷ In this era, Hollywood's costumes were replicated and sold to numerous fashion outlets throughout America. This relationship was heavily publicised via the films themselves and the marketing campaigns of department stores. Films of this period were understood as the inspiration for contemporary fashions, and the costume designer was required to create designs which would appeal to consumers, while, of course, fulfilling the aesthetic and narrative needs of the film. In his biography, Cecil B. DeMille spoke of the impact this symbiosis had upon the film industry at this time. He claimed '[t]hey wanted few (preferably no) historical "costume" dramas, but much "modern" stuff with plenty of clothes',¹⁵⁸ in order to keep up with existing fashion trends and initiate new ones. Although as fashion historians note, this often proved difficult.

It is important to note here that, according to discourses circulating at the time, these Hollywood fashions were looked down upon by high fashion centres such as Paris and

¹⁵⁵ Charlotte Herzog (1990) "'Powder Puff" Promotion: The Fashion Show-in-the-Film' in *Fabrications* (eds) Charlotte Herzog & Jane Gaines, London & New York Routledge pp.122-134, Charles Eckert (1990) 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window' in *Fabrications*, Charlotte Herzog & Jane Gaines, London & New York Routledge pp. 100-122

¹⁵⁶ Eckert, 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window'

¹⁵⁷ Eckert, 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window', p. 107

¹⁵⁸ Cecil B. DeMille quoted in Eckert, p. 106

New York. Indeed, several attempts to create a symbiosis between high fashion and Hollywood failed, the most often cited being MGM's recruitment of Coco Chanel (for \$1 million) as a costume designer in 1931. The outcome was disastrous, with Chanel returning to Paris before completing her one year contract. Therefore, as Stella Bruzzi acknowledges in her book Undressing Cinema, '[c]outure's involvement with cinema has an elaborate and fragmented history.'¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Sarah Berry's account of fashion and film in the 1930s also acknowledges a hostility felt by *haute couture* designers towards Hollywood costuming. In her chapter which examines the relationship between costume and spectacle, she includes an anecdote from costume designer Howard Greer who claims that:

New York and Paris disdainfully looked down their august noses at the dresses we designed in Hollywood... There I wallowed in rhinestone, and feathers, and furs and loved every minute of it.¹⁶⁰

Greer's comments are structured by cultural distinctions, which are, of course, informed by class. He attacks the cultural centres Paris and New York through terms such as 'disdain' and 'august' while simultaneously acknowledging the low cultural status of Hollywood costuming. The materials described (rhinestones, feathers and fur), although arguably connoting luxury, simultaneously signify 'low' culture. Rhinestones for example, are inexpensive imitations of expensive legitimate goods. This of course, connects with Veblen's notion of 'conspicuous consumption' which, as discussed in the introduction, is the 'vulgar' display of wealth associated with the 'leisure class'. Greer therefore, demonstrates an awareness of socially established hierarchies which recognise high fashion as 'exclusive' and 'worthwhile', but he also makes clear the resistive pleasure he felt as a costume designer in classical Hollywood (which I will return to in more detail in chapter two). Nevertheless, inherent within the passage is the suggestion that costume was considered as a potential threat to high fashion.

These tensions are also discussed in other academic studies of fashion and film history. For example, Jane Gaines' analysis of the silent and early classical era demonstrates that the film industry experienced some hostility from high fashion designers. She claims that in response to the economic effects of the depression, Hollywood created a series of costumes that could be copied and mass produced. This resulted in an emergence of films which included a fashion show segment (e.g. Mannequin (1937), Fashions of 1934 (1934),

¹⁵⁹ Bruzzi Undressing Cinema p. 3

¹⁶⁰ Howard Greer quoted in Berry, Screen Style, p. 47

Roberta (1935) and Stolen Holiday (1937)) designed to create tie-in opportunities with department stores. She describes this period as the most ‘unabashedly commercial’ in fashion and film history. Interestingly, Gaines acknowledges that filmmakers of the time also vocalised anxieties regarding the blatant commercial desires of the industry which are remarkably similar to those apparent in contemporary discourses regarding fashion programming. For example, she claims that in a bid to appear as more than ‘unabashedly commercial’,¹⁶¹ and to preserve ‘a notion of art that stands apart from the vicissitudes of commerce’,¹⁶² both film makers and costume designers alike denied their involvement with the ‘ready to wear’ fashion industry.

As such, it is important to note that the concerns in the contemporary period regarding the role of screen media in the ‘democratisation’ of fashion are not new. As demonstrated here, they are also apparent within historical discourse. However, what I wish to highlight is the way in which these historical concerns no longer preoccupy discourses around classical film. Significantly, the testimonies of high fashion designers of the contemporary era do not exercise the same hostility apparent in the classical era. In contrast, they look upon the classical era as a creative and inspirational time period. In the article ‘Designing Minds’, designers Bob Mackie, Richard Tyler, Tom Ford (of Gucci) and Anna Sui, each reference the classical Hollywood period when asked to discuss the relationship between fashion and contemporary film. Tyler, rather than ‘disdainfully looking down his august nose’ at costuming, recalls:

Orry-Kelly...had a huge influence on me, as did Edith Head and Theadora Van Runkle. Head did those incredible bias-cut gowns that women wanted then as they do now. Her impact on 20th century films and fashion is inestimable... my designs for today’s stars are inspired by the years of Marlene Dietrich and Jean Harlow.¹⁶³

Similarly, Tom Ford is quoted as saying, ‘Every season new films influence me, but perhaps those older films influence me even more.’¹⁶⁴ Here Ford creates a distinction between ‘new’ films and ‘classical’ Hollywood which pivots on a romanticised view of Hollywood costuming. Both Ford and Tyler’s comments laud the designs of Hollywood costumers as art and present the process of costume designing in the classical era as

¹⁶¹ Gaines, ‘Costume and Narrative’, p. 198

¹⁶² Gaines, ‘Costume and Narrative’, p. 198

¹⁶³ Richard Tyler cited in George Christy (October 20-26, 1998) ‘Designing Minds’, The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue, p. S-21

¹⁶⁴ Tom Ford cited in George Christy, ‘Designing Minds’, p. S.20

creative and therefore ‘active’. In addition, these attitudes are also informed by romanticised notion of classical Hollywood stardom which resonates within the contemporary cultural imagination. In a similar article in the 2000 issue of ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ entitled ‘The Hollywood Mystique’, which also invites contemporary fashion designers to share thoughts on the symbiotic relationship between fashion and film, each designer interviewed references classical films and stars of the 1930s and 40s. As with the ‘Designing Minds’ article, no designers recall the hostility which fashion historians believe to have circulated during the time. Giorgio Armani, for example, claims that ‘Fashion and Hollywood are eternally intermingled, and that’s wonderful for both industries, appreciating as they do each other’s creativity.’¹⁶⁵ Notably absent from this passage is the notion that classical Hollywood was recognised as one of the most ‘unashamedly commercial’ periods in cinema history.

In addition, within the ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ special editions it is significant that the ‘Fashion-Show-in Film’ genre is not mentioned, despite its popularity. Rather, the issues specifically focus on instances when high fashion is used in film, as opposed to ready to wear or ‘everyday’ fashion. I am not suggesting that The Hollywood Reporter has deliberately constructed a romanticised view of classical Hollywood film, for indeed notions of ‘old Hollywood glamour’ as ‘classic’ circulate beyond trade discourse. Nor am I suggesting that this reconstruction of film history is used to degrade the use of fashion in film and television in the contemporary period. Rather, what I am suggesting here is that the ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ issues are deliberately tapping into nostalgic memories/representations of classical Hollywood cinema in order to ‘borrow’ or transfer the symbolic value associated with this mythologised period to contemporary onscreen fashion.

A recurring example of fashion and film fusion is referenced throughout the issue which is used to legitimate contemporary onscreen fashion. The article ‘Perfect Fit’, describes Audrey Hepburn and Givenchy’s collaboration on celebrated films such as Breakfast at Tiffany’s (1961), Roman Holiday (1953) and Sabrina (1954).¹⁶⁶ This canon of films has come to represent an important moment in the history of fashion and film and this is not

¹⁶⁵ Giorgio Armani cited in George Christy (31st October - 6th November 2000) ‘The Hollywood Mystique’, The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue, p. S-18

¹⁶⁶ Malerie Willens (October 20-26, 1998) ‘Perfect Fit’ The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issues,

simply limited to the trade discourse examined here. For example, in one of the numerous ‘coffee table’ books which celebrates fashion and costume in cinema, Hepburn contributes an essay entitled ‘The Costumes Make the Actors: A Personal View’ in which she recalls Givenchy and costume designer Edith Head’s contribution to *Sabrina* (which received an academy award for best costume and a nomination for Best Actress).¹⁶⁷ The critical acclaim and popularity of the Hepburn films perhaps accounts for the longevity of their presence in popular and academic discourses. For as illustrated within the trade press (and beyond)¹⁶⁸ the Hepburn films have come to represent the notion of ‘classic’ and have become legitimated as ‘popular art’. The ‘Perfect Fit’ article reads:

Theirs was the ultimate symbiosis, the perfect marriage: Hepburn credited Givenchy with creating her sophisticated continental image, while she served as his muse and helped make his name synonymous with *haute couture*. This was and still is the quintessential fashion relationship and today remains the archetype to which celebrities and designers aspire.¹⁶⁹

The use of language in this passage seeks to affirm classical Hollywood as culturally legitimate, using the cultural value assigned to *haute couture*. Referring to Hepburn as Givenchy’s ‘muse’ not only suggests that his creations were ‘art’, but it also implies that Hepburn’s star power was in some ways ‘goddess like’. This use of language engages with contemporary discourses regarding stardom and celebrity and seems to be a deliberate attempt to situate Hepburn’s classical stardom in opposition to contemporary fame which is often seen as ephemeral.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, Hepburn’s ‘sophisticated continental image’,¹⁷¹ foregrounds an association with ‘Europeanness’, in an attempt to distance her from the commercialism of Hollywood (and the U.S. in general). Finally, the use of absolute terms such as ‘perfect fit’ and ‘ultimate symbiosis’ contribute to the sense that this particular union could not have been achieved simply through a financial undertaking, but uses romantic rhetoric to convey the understanding that this union was kismet. This is affirmed in the opening passage which begins by claiming that ‘Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy’s lifelong collaboration was world renowned, yet they found each other almost by accident.’¹⁷² Again, to return to the earlier discussion of the ‘Fashion System’, this

¹⁶⁷ R & P Engelmeier (eds) (1997) *Fashion in Film*, Munich and New York: Prestel

¹⁶⁸ In 2009 a selection of Hepburn’s personal items were put up for auction; the most anticipated was the Givenchy gown she wore in *How to Steal a Million* (1966).

¹⁶⁹ Willens, ‘Perfect Fit’, p. S-26

¹⁷⁰ The concepts of stardom and celebrity will be examined in more detail in chapters 3, 7, 8 and 9.

¹⁷¹ Willens, ‘Perfect Fit’, p. S-26

¹⁷² Willens, ‘Perfect Fit’, pS-26

description of Hepburn and Givenchy's relationship supports the claim that the fashion industry relies upon the myth that high fashion cannot be forecasted. Hepburn and Givenchy's chance meeting gives currency to the understanding that fashion is an unpredictable phenomenon that relies upon these kinds of encounters between designers and their muses. Audrey Hepburn is therefore used as a touchstone within The Hollywood Reporter to situate contemporary fashion cinema and programming within a legitimate history and remains so, until the 2000 edition of 'Fashion in Entertainment'. This particular issue marks a departure from earlier prejudices toward fashion programming and signals an attitudinal shift toward the acceptance of onscreen fashion on television.

'From the Catwalk to the Living Room': Sex and the City and High Onscreen Fashion

The final page of the 2000 issue depicts film actress Penelope Cruz next to the tagline 'The Fashion-forward starlet graces young Hollywood with Elegant style.' The article positions Penelope Cruz as an 'up and coming fashion icon',¹⁷³ and asks 'Will all this attention elevate Cruz to the level of an Audrey Hepburn, or, as of late, Sarah Jessica Parker, whose every outfit has been critiqued and copied by legions of women?'.¹⁷⁴

I wish to highlight two interrelated points with regard to this seemingly throwaway comment. First, the article uses the name Audrey Hepburn to associate Cruz with a specific notion of prestige, Europeaness, glamour and iconicity. Second, the article acknowledges the cultural pervasiveness of SJP's function as a fashion icon (following the success of SATC) and presupposes that she too has achieved a similar status to Hepburn. Moreover, SATC was only included within the 'Fashion in Entertainment' issue for the first time in 2000 despite its initial broadcast in June 1998 coinciding with the first issue. This comment then indicates a significant shift within the trade press: television's increasing legitimacy as the dominant medium for onscreen fashion. The discourse also suggests that this legitimacy is achieved primarily through the increasing critical and commercial success of SATC. While the article 'Undressing "Sex and the City"', suggests a degree of uncertainty regarding the future relationship between television and fashion insofar as the final paragraph begins "'Sex and the City" may turn out to be one of the most influential

¹⁷³ Rachel Fischer (October 31-November 6, 2000) 'Cruz Wear', The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issues, pS-28

¹⁷⁴ Fischer, 'Cruz Wear', pS-28

postmillennial TV shows in terms of fashion'¹⁷⁵ (my emphasis), it does acknowledge its pervasiveness. It is apparent that in the later editions of the 'Fashion in Entertainment' special issues, SATC occupies the position previously reserved for classical Hollywood cinema. That is, it has become a 'legitimate' example of fashion and screen symbiosis. Thus, the show is used to demonstrate the 'appropriate' usage of high fashion on television within the fashion trade press.

Indeed SATC's position as a 'legitimate' 'popular art' stretches beyond the television trade press. For example, an article in WWD entitled 'TV ups the fashion quotient', examines the emergence of television programmes which have increased their usage of fashion. It indicates that television, including teen shows Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003) and Felicity (1998-2002) and more adult shows Friends (1994-2004), Will & Grace (1998-2006) and The Sopranos (1999-2007) worked as excellent backdrops to showcase high fashion and it is suggested that the impact of SATC in some way contributed to this change. It reads:

The practice [of fashion placement] used to be the domain of mostly moderate and contemporary labels. These days, companies as sophisticated as Prada, Tod's, Jimmy Choo and Burberry are falling over themselves to get clothes on "Sex and the City" and other programmes. Where there's a connection these days, synergy soon follows.¹⁷⁶

The article stresses that fashion designers' interest in fictional television is relatively new and explicitly holds the 'quality' television development accountable for this change. For example, Tommy Hilfiger's publicity director Alexander Crane claims that 'Television's opened up a whole new world of marketing for us. And lucky for us, TV's programming has definitely gotten better.'¹⁷⁷ The pervasiveness of the term 'quality' television and its associations with the 'cinematic' denotes a shift toward the 'legitimation' of a specific discursive category of programming. These developments are central to the fashion trade discourse and are used as a way of deflecting criticisms that high fashion is being exposed in the 'low' status medium of television. For example SATC was, by 2000, widely recognised as 'quality' television (both within the academy and in press discourse). As an

¹⁷⁵ Randee Dawn (31 October - 6 November 2000) 'Undressing "Sex and the City"', The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issues, p. S-4

¹⁷⁶ Merle Ginsberg (28 July 2000) 'TV Ups the Fashion Quotient', Women's Wear Daily, www.wwd.com (accessed 28/3/08)

¹⁷⁷ Ginsberg, 'TV Ups the Fashion Quotient'

HBO production (the slogan for which is, 'It's not TV. It's HBO'), the show was further removed from the 'low' cultural value previously associated with the mass medium.

Discourses of 'quality' television are implicit within the 'Undressing "Sex and the City"' article, which does not position any form of television as 'low' in cultural status. The article interviews the show's stylists Rebecca and Patricia Field who when commenting on the symbiotic relationship between fashion and television claim that 'Television is a great way to speak to millions of people. Anybody who pooh-poohs television is just being crotchety...It's bigger than any feature in an artsy fartsy magazine'.¹⁷⁸ This attitude towards fashion and television was not previously vocalised in The Hollywood Reporter. Following the 2000 issue of 'Fashion in Entertainment' it would appear that the concerns and anxieties surrounding the medium of television present in earlier editions have been suitably deflected. However, the subsequent issues foreground other aspects of fashion programming which have incited debate and discussion regarding cultural value.

To summarise, the discourses apparent in the trade press indicate a series of assumptions regarding media specificity (in this case television) and value. The changing attitudes over the three issues of 'Fashion in Entertainment' suggest that initial concerns regarding the value of fashion programming were deflected and a new discourse emerges which understands fashion programming as financially viable, culturally legitimate and worthwhile. This complex process involves a reassessment of traditional attitudes which have been dictated by a series of assumptions regarding the oppositions between mass culture and 'art'. Moreover, the shift is also indicative of specific historical, cultural and industrial factors which encourage a revision of existing prejudices regarding both cultural industries. For example, as articulated above, significant changes within the fashion industry (such as the increase in designer off the rack lines) affected the symbolic value of fashion. In addition, the changes within the television landscape (specifically the arrival of multi-channel and cable television) which are considered to be responsible for the emergence of 'quality' television, also play an important role in making fashion programming 'popular art.'

Leading on from the analysis here, the following chapters seek to examine the figure of the television stylist and the celebrity 'fashion icon' in order to further gain an understanding

¹⁷⁸ Patricia Field cited in Dawn, 'Undressing Sex and the City', p. S-4

of the ways in which attitudes towards fashion programming have been shaped by these earlier prejudices.

Chapter Two

Fashion and Costuming: Processes of Production and Consumption

‘I am a stylist, I like the commerce end of it. I love to style.’¹⁷⁹

This chapter has two interrelated aims. First, it seeks to contribute to the debates explored in the previous chapter regarding fashion programming and its shifting position within a cultural hierarchy. Second, it examines the discourse which surrounds the ‘television stylist’, arguing that the trade press endeavours to construct the role of the figure as both ‘creative’ and ‘active’. In so doing, the ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ special editions negotiate a series of tensions regarding ‘art vs. commerce’ and ‘active vs. passive’ which surround the stylist.

The trade press suggests that contemporary costume designing no longer involves designing and creating wardrobes, but rather requires the designer to select garments (both designer and high street) and ‘style’ characters. A change in terminology (the use of the term of stylist rather than costume designer) reflects this industrial development and is also significant in terms of the cultural value assigned to each term.¹⁸⁰ In the previous chapter, I outlined the nature of the symbiotic relationship between the television and fashion industries. The economic benefits of fashion placement in contemporary shows were highlighted within the trade press, however, as previously mentioned this ignited anxieties regarding the cultural and symbolic value of fashion programming. The costume designer is also central to these debates insofar as the use of fashion placement has affected their role and consequently their own symbolic value. The increasing involvement of fashion designers in screen media is often discussed in the trade press as a ‘necessary evil’ which the costume designer must negotiate.

The evolution of the stylist is under discussion in a number of articles which examine the relationship between costume and fashion designers. In each of these articles, costume designers express their views on the role of the contemporary stylist with reference to the classical period and acknowledge the supposed change. The opinions of the industry professionals reveal some interesting, and at times contradictory, discourses which are

¹⁷⁹ Patricia Field - stylist of *SATC* – cited in Polly Wilson (October 22-28 2002) ‘After a Fashion’ *The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment*, p.S-6

¹⁸⁰ I will be using the terms interchangeably as I do not wish to participate in the degradation of the role of the contemporary stylist.

shaped by several interrelated tensions. These include issues of production and consumption, the relationship between the costume designer and the writer and the relationship between on and off screen fashion. Thus, what follows is a brief overview of the few academic accounts of costume design in the classical Hollywood period before identifying the key concerns which structure the discourse surrounding the figure. I then seek to offer an analysis of the central debates which preoccupy the contemporary costume design.

Ownership, Legitimacy and the Role of the Costume Designer

Despite their role as a creative force in the production of film and television, contemporary costume designers are rarely discussed with the same level of respect as directors. In fact, they are rarely the subject of discussion at all. Within the body of academic work which examines costume and fashion in film, the role of the contemporary costume designer is rarely examined in any detail.¹⁸¹ All of this points to a perception of a lack of cultural legitimacy which is echoed in the trade discourse. Unlike the writer, director or costumers of the classical era, the contemporary costume designer is not credited as contributing to a project (be it film or television) in any artistic way, and unlike fashion designers they are seen to lack the ownership of their products. In the first of a series of articles which examines the role of the costume designer, Deborah Nadoolman Landis, who is characterised as one of the ‘most vocal critics of the spotlight’s shift from costumer designers’ work to fashion’,¹⁸² claims ‘Our frustration stems from years of being overlooked...Costume designers have a very low status in the industry. We are underpaid. Many earn less than hair and makeup artists.’¹⁸³

Landis’ claim suggests that, while abundant in cultural capital, the costume designer is low in economic capital and is thus overlooked within the industry. While Landis is referring specifically to the film industry here, there appears to be an additional hierarchy in which film costumers are privileged over television costume designers or stylists. This of course, speaks to broader concerns regarding the cultural legitimacy of the both media. However,

¹⁸¹ Indeed, more studies focus specifically on the classical Hollywood designer. See Elizabeth Nielson’s (1990) article ‘Handmaidens of the Glamour Culture: Costumers in the Hollywood Studio System,’ in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (eds) *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, London & New York

¹⁸² Denise Abbott (October 20-26 1998) ‘Apart at the Seams’, *The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment*, p. S-13

¹⁸³ Deborah Nadoolman Landis cited in Abbott, ‘Apart at the Seams’, p. S-13

in addition, it is most likely because television costume designers, as opposed to film, are denied a 'legitimate' history which produced respected costumers (such as Edith Head or Gilbert Adrian) who are protected by their own legitimacy. That said, these examples are exceptional cases. As demonstrated by costumer Howard Greer's comments in the previous chapter, the work of costume designers of the classical era was disparaged by couturiers at the time. Moreover, as Nielson demonstrates in her examination of the role of the costume designer in the classical Hollywood era, the majority of film costumers remained unknown. Nielson's work is useful here insofar as it demonstrates that this lack of respect toward the costume designer was felt in the classical period – despite the discourse in the trade press which suggests that the classical costume designers were revered. Yet, I do not wish to overstate the function of Nielson's article with regard to this study - while it does offer a narrative of how the classical Hollywood costume designer was understood in an historical and an industrial context, it must not be forgotten that this is only one narrative amongst a myriad of others which could be told. Nevertheless, the connection between contemporary and classical Hollywood costume designers is fostered within the trade press, as such Nielson's examination of classical Hollywood costume designer proves a useful reference point and demonstrates a discourse which circulated at the time and perhaps contributes to the ways in which the contemporary costume designer is understood. For example, Nielson demonstrates that the lack of respect directed toward the costume designer emerges as a result of the gendered nature of the role. The implicitly feminine job was 'low' in cultural value and remained distant from any artistic merit that was bestowed upon fashion designers (often coded as a male profession). This, she argues, was reflected in pay scales which were incredibly low in the 1930s.

While the pay scales for contemporary costume designers are not explicitly revealed in the trade press, Landis suggests that there remains a lack of respect toward those in the profession and this is reflected in their relatively low remuneration. As such, the articles in The Hollywood Reporter, which allow costume designers space to discuss their role, illustrate their frustration as they view their role in television and film production as central. The articles detail this role and the costume designers' understanding of its importance specifically with regard to character and narrative.

Most of the costume designers interviewed within the 'Fashion in Entertainment' special issues suggested that their priority was to use costume to communicate something about

the personality/social situation of character to the audience. Debra McGuire (costume designer for Friends), in the article ‘After a Fashion’ comments on the importance of the narrative and character when it comes to costuming. She claims:

When you do television or movies, you’re character-driven in the creation process, and you’re driven by the written word, and that’s the only motivation. It can’t be about being seen or making a statement because what really needs to make a statement is the written word. Our job is to be a support system for the writer and help the writer realize their vision – and the job can’t be any more than that.¹⁸⁴

This passage demonstrates the need felt by the costume designer to complement, or to use Gaines’ term ‘serve’, narrative and characterisation. The function of costume then, is primarily to contribute to the audience’s ‘suspended disbelief’ insofar as Sarah Street argues, ‘it is possible that there might be an “imagined embodiment” in process whereby the audience imagines that the character has exercised a degree of individual agency when deciding what to wear, just as they experience in their own lives’.¹⁸⁵ As such, the costume designer must strive to remain invisible. Moreover, this invisibility contributes to the lack of ownership the costumer has over his/her product. Whereas a fashion designer is able to mark their garment with a signature (and in so doing ‘change the social nature of the object’¹⁸⁶ i.e. give it value), the costumer is unable to take credit for the designs created.

Within the trade discourse, the need for the wardrobe to ‘make sense’ within the fictional world of the text was a prominent theme. Often, it was suggested that the inclusion of designer pieces could prove problematic. For example, costume designer for Felicity, Linda Serijan-Fasmer recalls an occasion in which she refused to include pieces from a Calvin Klein collection, precisely because it did not ‘make sense’ for the character. She reveals ‘Calvin Klein wanted to fly me to New York for the clothes, but I respectfully declined because ours is the most un-kleiny show imaginable. Felicity [Keri Russell] is an 18-year-old student, and everyone knows her character couldn’t afford to dress up like that.’¹⁸⁷ Here, Fasmer’s concern is that the use of Calvin Klein garments would not ‘make sense’ within the diegesis of the show. The character of Felicity does not have the economic capital (within the world of the show) to purchase these items and as such there would be some disparity between what the audience are told as a part of the narrative and

¹⁸⁴ Debra McGuire cited in Wilson, ‘After a Fashion’, p. S-8

¹⁸⁵ Street, Costume and Cinema, p.7

¹⁸⁶ Bourdieu, ‘*Haute Couture*, Haute Culture’, p. 137

¹⁸⁷ Linda Serijan-Fasmer cited in Denise Abbott (19th-25th October) ‘TV Teen Threads’ in The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue, p. S-32

what they are being shown. Similarly, costume designer Betsy Heinmann, when discussing the use of fashion as costume, makes an interesting (if somewhat contradictory) comment. She claims ‘No one dresses from head to toe in one designer... I’m happy to use a piece here, a piece there, but it’s probably not realistic to use only one designer. I’m trying to make a real person.’¹⁸⁸ While she is clearly not trying to create a *real* person, but dress a fictional one, it is interesting that ‘realism’ is so key here, and that Heinmann’s comments demonstrate her commitment to character. Conversely, Patricia Field openly rejects this method of costuming, which may speak to SATC’s innovation in fashion and costuming (which will be discussed further in Chapter Four). In the show’s official companion book, Field demonstrates that she is less concerned with realism: ‘I’m here to entertain. This show is not a documentary... I never worry that Carrie’s wardrobe doesn’t make sense for a writer’s income’.¹⁸⁹ That said, it should be noted that Field’s approach to costuming is unique. Within the trade press, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of contemporary costume designers seek to ‘serve’ the narrative and diegetic needs of the show.

In addition, similar concerns are articulated by costume designers within the trade press, which again stem from the understanding that the costumer should only be responsible for character and narrative, and not responsible for initiating fashion trends. This is implied in McGuire’s comments (she suggests that costume should not make a ‘statement’) and is explicitly voiced by Rachael Stanley (costume designer for Ally McBeal and Sabrina the Teenage Witch (1996-2003), who remarks:

My goal is to dress my characters in the most beautiful way I can to promote the story... If, as a result, viewers latch onto a look, that’s terrific. But that is never my motivation. I’m always shocked when I hear someone boast, “I’m going to start a look.” Well, fine, but what if the character doesn’t fit that look? Worrying about how an outfit will play in Peoria is not our job.¹⁹⁰

Historically, film and television costume have ignited trends, whether this emerges organically or as the result of commercial tie-in strategies. However, within the trade press, costume designers suggest that this should not be a primary concern of the costumer, and look down upon those who seek to use television or film as a platform to deliberately initiate trends - despite the fact that it is precisely the ability to create trends which

¹⁸⁸ Betsy Heinmann in Debra Kaufman (October 19-25, 1999) ‘Costume Drama’, The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue, p. S-5

¹⁸⁹ Field in Sohn, Kiss and Tell, p. 69

¹⁹⁰ Stanley in Denise Abbott ‘TV Teen Threads’, p. S-32

contributes to the fashion designer's legitimacy. For Stanley, it is their role in 'serving the picture' which contributes to their cultural legitimacy. The language used here, and throughout the interviews with costume designers, is quite self sacrificing – they are willing to remain invisible for the good of the picture (this is also evident in Maguire's comments above). However, Nielson's historical account of classical Hollywood costuming suggests that this is precisely why a number of tailors, sewers and designers opted to work in the industry. She writes:

skilled artisans were drawn to Hollywood to create clothing that was not only meant for actors to wear but for people to see. Since the wages of manufacturing employees were so low in the 1930s, one must assume that there was a special attention in creating clothing that would become "bigger than life" on motion picture theatre screens.¹⁹¹

The 'bigger than life' clothing refers to the garments which will become fashion in their extra-textual circulation (as garments to be sold in department stores). However, in the classical era there was also a concern that 'spectacular' clothing was problematic when used as costume. As discussed briefly in the introduction to this thesis, there is a body of academic work on fashion and film which suggests that fashion cannot function as costume, because it is in some way a 'distraction' from narrative. This body of work, I have suggested, is informed by the problematic assumption that spectacle and narrative work against one another. Moreover, in order to understand precisely *how and why* costume disrupts narrative, further investigation into the text's reception needs to be undertaken. While I will discuss this further in subsequent chapters, it is useful to mention it here as much of the contemporary discourse remains informed by these (potentially problematic) assumptions. For example, in the article 'Apart at the Seams' the opening paragraph outlines a series of concerns which have arisen regarding the developments within fashion placement and costume design. One of these is the way that fashion can draw attention away from the characters. It reads:

As off-the-shelf fashion continues to weave its way into film and television, the clothes onscreen can draw as much attention as the characters in them. This rankles many costume designers, who increasingly find their craft at odds with the high powered marketing machines of the top labels.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Nielson, 'Handmaidens of the Glamour Culture', p. 178

¹⁹² Abbott, 'Apart at the Seams', p. S-13

Similarly, to return to McGuire's remarks cited above, she suggests that it is important that the clothes do not 'make a statement'. While this comment is equally as vague as the term 'distraction', insofar as it does not communicate precisely how dress 'makes a statement' or how the audience is cued to know when a dress *is* making a statement, it does demonstrate that there is a preoccupation among costume designers to prove their commitment to the show rather than the designer. The hostility between fashion designers and costume designers demonstrated within the trade press is reminiscent of that described by Greer in the classical period. Similarly, the 'Fashion in Entertainment' special issues demonstrate that, as with Greer, the costume designers of the contemporary period demonstrate 'resistive' behaviour towards the fashion industry. While Greer remarks that he 'wallowed' in the vulgar and excessive world of Hollywood costuming, the costumers of the contemporary period similarly do not appear to let the fashion world dictate their costuming. For example, when Fasmer discusses her costuming in *Felicity* she implies that it is necessary to somehow 'disguise' the use of designer clothes. She claims; 'I may incorporate a designer here or there, but no one would ever recognize it.' For Fasmer, this comment demonstrates her commitment to the show rather than the designer; she does not include designer garments in order to publicise the brand, but rather she uses it as a part of the wardrobe for the character. Moreover, this discourse regarding the role of the costume designer seeks to present the figure as resistant to the economic benefits of fashion placement and presents their role in styling as quite subversive.

The Art of Costume Design: Contemporary Costuming and Consumer Culture

In the article 'After a Fashion', costume and fashion designer Bob Mackie voices his concerns regarding the changing role of the costume designer. He claims, '[a] lot of costume design now, I'm afraid is all about the shopping; most of the films are modern and sometimes (the producers) get something for free.'¹⁹³ Mackie's derogatory attitude towards contemporary costume design is informed by longstanding assumptions which privilege the processes of production over consumption. For Mackie, the creative processes necessary for designing and producing fashion and costume are absent from shopping/styling which lacks this kind of 'practical' creativity. Moreover, he suggests that the motivation for shopping over designing is a result of economic necessity (i.e. sometimes the producers get something for free) rather than creative expression.

¹⁹³ Bob Mackie, 'After a Fashion', p. S-8

Cultural critics informed by Marxist thought have long since considered processes of design/production as inherently active and consumption practices as inherently passive. For Marxist critics, meaning is inscribed on a commodity during the production process and in turn (passively) consumed in the consumption process. In terms of fashion then, the designer participates in the 'legitimate' processes of production and is viewed as solely responsible for creating the symbolic meaning of the garment. The consumer/wearer would not take part in the meaning making process. As such, consumption is often accepted as the 'negative other' of production.¹⁹⁴ While more contemporary scholars from within cultural studies have attempted to challenge this school of thought, and consider processes of consumption as an area of serious academic study,¹⁹⁵ these traditional assumptions still resonate in contemporary society (and as this chapter demonstrates, structure the discourses which circulate within The Hollywood Reporter). It is also important to note here, that these readings of production and consumption are gendered - passivity is equated with femininity and activity with masculinity. Indeed, even within the 'feminine' industry of fashion, Joanne Hollows argues that the gendered distinction between production and consumption still applies: masculinity is associated with the production of fashion, and femininity with its consumption. Moreover, the production of fashion is understood as a form of 'labour', consumption on the other hand is not understood as labour – which again contributes to its trivialisation within patriarchal discourses. The figure of the housewife, for example, often responsible for the consumption of household goods, is rarely considered as engaging in active labour. Rather, she is mostly viewed as 'the superficial, status seeking, housewife-consumer lusting after consumer goods to satisfy false needs.'¹⁹⁶ Or as Mica Nava puts it, 'The activity of the consumer is likely to be constructed as impulsive and trivial, as lacking in agency'¹⁹⁷, and despite developments in recent feminist scholarship which seek to challenge these conservative ideologies they remain in circulation.

These longstanding assumptions are reflected in the discourse surrounding the contemporary costume designer who has, according to the trade press, become distanced from processes of production (and proper labour) and is now associated primarily with

¹⁹⁴ Hollows, *Femininity, Feminism and Popular Culture*, p.114

¹⁹⁵ See Daniel Miller (1994) *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, Oxford: Blackwell

¹⁹⁶ Daniel Miller (1995) 'Consumption as the Vanguard of History: A Polemic by way of an Introduction' in D Miller ed., *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*, London: Routledge, p. 38

¹⁹⁷ Mica Nava (1992) *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Cultures*, London: Sage p. 190

consumption practices. In the article 'Costume Drama', Debra McGuire reveals that often in TV costume design 'producers don't hire a designer...they can hire a costume supervisor to shop...and a lot of producers think that doing a show is shopping.'¹⁹⁸ McGuire demonstrates here, the lack of respect bestowed upon the costume designer by television producers, and how this lack of respect stems from the assumption that shopping for a television show requires no creativity and is not really considered proper 'labour'. In addition, McGuire's comment suggests that the role of the shopper is 'trivial' and 'inconsequential'. In other words, the costume department is an area where studios can save money, because it is not seen as essential to the overall success of the show, despite the fact that it is thought to be an additional source of pleasure for audiences. Indeed, the hostility towards TV producers is apparent within the trade discourse. The 'Costume Drama' article, for example, is shaped by these concerns – the opening paragraph reads; 'Is the big business of fashion design taking over the art of costume design? Is fashion placement replacing creativity? It's a volatile topic but fashion designers and costume designers are eager to talk'.¹⁹⁹ This article's sympathy toward costume designers suggests that the alliance with fashion designers - engineered by TV producers in a bid to save money - has resulted in a loss of agency and creativity for the costume designer. She is now reduced to a passive consumer, concerned only with the surface appearance of the show.

A counter discourse which views the contemporary costume designer as a 'creative shopper' is also apparent in later issues of the 'Fashion in Entertainment' series, and this alternative discourse also engages with notions of activity and passivity. The 'creative shopper' complicates the longstanding assumption that shopping is a passive process. However, this is not to suggest that the understanding is entirely rejected. Indeed the term itself relies upon the negative connotations associated with shopping in order to establish itself as different and 'creative'. The notion of the creative shopper problematises the understanding that meaning is encoded into a cultural product at the level of production and consumed passively. This discourse views creative shopping as involved in the 'meaning-making' process rather than simply absorbing existing meaning.

¹⁹⁸ McGuire cited in Kaufman, 'Costume Drama', p. S-5

¹⁹⁹ Kaufman, 'Costume Drama', p. S-5

Indeed, there is a body of academic work that challenges the assumption that consumption is inherently passive. Moreover, these studies also seek to revise the notion that meaning is only created during production. Instead, this work suggests that ‘there can be no absolute symmetry between the ‘moments’ of design/production and consumption/use’.²⁰⁰ As such, it considers the ‘total trajectory of an object as it moves from production through exchange, distribution, mediation and consumption’.²⁰¹ This line of argument is useful when thinking about attitudes toward costuming and styling. For example, the costume designer proper (i.e. the person responsible for designing and creating costume) is thought to have encoded the garments with meaning during this process. The meaning here (as previously discussed) is supposed to in some way communicate something about the character and/or the narrative. The stylist or creative shopper is thought to have acquired clothes which are already inscribed with meaning. However, some of the testimonies of costume designers in the trade press demonstrate how the process of shopping and styling for a wardrobe requires creativity and makes meaning. Moreover, it also suggests that the contemporary costume designers or stylists require a specific set of cultural competences in order to fulfil the role of creative shopper and indeed, begin to suggest that this ‘new’ role can be considered proper labour. For example, in an article on teen television and fashion, Fasmer details the method she uses when styling. She remarks, ‘[t]he actresses all wear slip dresses and hippy jewelry. I try very hard not to look like designer clothes [sic]... I’ll put together combinations the ‘average person’ would never dream of: Birkenstock boots with a \$500 Gaultier top I picked up at an outlet for \$80’.²⁰² Fasmer reveals here, that the act of styling - that is, putting together a wardrobe from ready made garments - requires a set of skills that, as she explicitly states the average person does not possess (‘I put together combinations the average person would never dream of’). These skills, it is suggested, are in aesthetics, taste and consumption practices. Far from the stereotype of the ‘zombie housewife’ who consumes irresponsibly to satisfy false needs, Fasmer discusses how she utilises thrift stores, (acquiring a \$500 top for \$80) demonstrating that she is a responsible consumer. Furthermore, this anecdote reveals that she does not include a designer name in order to fulfil any product placement agreement here, but rather uses it to enhance narrative and characterisation. Fasmer does not partake in the ‘vulgar’ display of wealth

²⁰⁰ Dick Hebdige (1998) *Hiding the Light: On Images and Things* London & New York: Routledge, pp. 80-81

²⁰¹ Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture*, p. 114

²⁰² Fasmer in Abbott, ‘TV Teen Threads’, p. s-30

rather she deliberately conceals the designer labels thereby foregrounding an association with a more refined taste formation. As such, Fasmer's (feminine) competences here are demonstrated as useful insofar as she can use her knowledge of aesthetics to create a visually pleasing wardrobe.

The assumption that the contemporary stylist requires a specific set of (feminine) skills is raised again in the 'Costume Drama' article. Debra McGuire also demonstrates her knowledge of aesthetics when she discusses incorporating designer garments into her costuming. She recalls altering specific garments so that they appear more visually pleasing onscreen. She claims 'I can't guarantee a designer that they're going to see what I buy from them in the state that I bought it; I might buy a dress and cut the sleeves off or reshape it, so my commitment is not to the designer at all.'²⁰³ Here, McGuire demonstrates not only her 'eye' for aesthetics and taste, but also her practical skills in altering garments. She thereby challenges those assumptions that styling requires no real labour, by demonstrating that often, garments require additional sewing, hemming, dyeing or completely reshaping – skills which are primarily associated with the production of garments. Moreover, this statement demonstrates the resistive behaviour discussed earlier, insofar as she refuses to allow designer garments/placement deals to dictate her costuming. Similarly, Alexandra Welker (costume designer on *Snoops* (1999) and later *The O.C.*) echoes McGuire's sentiments in the 'Costume Drama' article. She claims 'There are a lot of designers out there who I identify with, but I have no qualms about changing their designs. I might buy a great coat but embellish the collar. We're always busy in the workroom.'²⁰⁴ This again, demonstrates that fashion garments do not dictate the look of the show, and also suggests that the role of contemporary costume designers requires 'labour' (she even references a 'workroom' to reiterate this).

Both McGuire and Welker's comments here reveal that the role of the contemporary stylist remains central to the 'meaning-making' process regardless of whether they are involved in the production of the garments used onscreen. By altering specific garments or constructing outfits using a range of ready to wear designer and high street garments, the stylist still has an impact upon the meanings disseminated. In the 'Undressing *Sex and the City*' article, for example, Sarah Jessica Parker explains 'You don't want the clothes

²⁰³ Debra McGuire in Wilson, 'After a Fashion', p. S-8

²⁰⁴ Alexandra Welker cited in Kaufman, 'Costume Drama', p. S-6

wearing you because it looks contrived...People never look good when they look as if clothes were thrown on them.’²⁰⁵ This suggests that the stylist works as a mediator – in between the process of production and consumption the stylist mediates the meaning of the clothes in order to prevent them from appearing contrived. In line with Hebdige et al, then it is useful to think of the process of costuming from ‘production through exchange, distribution, *mediation* and consumption’²⁰⁶ (own emphasis) as the trade discourse suggests that meaning is made (and remade) at each stage of this process. An example of how meaning can be created during this mediation process can be found later in the ‘Undressing the “Sex and the City”’ article. In an interview with Patricia Field, she demonstrates how the use of designer clothes can be appropriated so that they can contribute to characterisation and give meaning. She claims, ‘Labels aren’t important per se. There are, however, favourite designers for each main character: Kim Cattrall’s Samantha gets Yigal Azouel, and Chloe is favorite for Parker’s Carrie, but the name is less important than how the style suits the actress.’²⁰⁷ Further, she asserts:

I can look at any dress in a department store and know: Charlotte (Kristin Davis) is the sweet idealistic one – she’s the one who reads *Vogue* and puts her name on the waiting list for the new hot skirt. Cynthia (Nixon’s Miranda) is the no nonsense, tailored one; Kim (Cattrall’s Samantha) is the ‘Dynasty’ one, living in the 80s.²⁰⁸

As these comments make clear, Field has retained her agency as a stylist and demonstrates a series of competences which suggest that she is not only able to decode the meanings associated with specific designer garments, but is also able to appropriate them so that the specific items of designer clothes have meaning with regard to character. In addition, the passage above suggests that Field understands the way in which the characters would consume fashion if they were ‘real’ people. To return to Street’s observation regarding ‘imagined embodiment’ (quoted earlier in this chapter), the fact that Field considers the way in which the characters would not only style themselves, but as the passage above suggests she also considers the character’s consumption practices (Charlotte would put her name down for something in *Vogue*) were they real people, suggests that she seeks to make it easier for the audience to imagine that the character has decided what to wear. Thus, while Field’s comments cited earlier in this chapter suggest that she is not primarily

²⁰⁵ Sarah Jessica Parker in Dawn, ‘Undressing “Sex and the City”’ p. S-4

²⁰⁶ Hebdige, *Hiding the Light: On Images and Things* pp. 80- 81

²⁰⁷ Patricia Field cited in Dawn, ‘Undressing Sex and the City’, p.S-4

²⁰⁸ Patricia Field cited in Dawn, ‘Undressing Sex and the City’, p.S-4

concerned with ‘realism’ (‘This show is not a documentary’), she does use fashion to complement character.

Similarly, in the article “‘Sex’ and the Accessory’, WWD remarks upon Field’s approach to costuming. It reads:

Patricia Field...said she scours the market to find resources that are unusual and unique. “It’s more interesting for the audience to see items that aren’t everywhere ...I try to be open to whatever comes my way. This season, I am feeling strongly about headwear, be it scarves or hats.”

The above passage seeks to demonstrate the ‘labour’ involved in selecting garments for the screen (Field *scours* the market for garments). Furthermore, from Field’s comments it is evident that while she is offered samples from designers (which she is ‘open to’), she has very strong ‘creative’ impulses which drive her methods.

Indeed, as the opening quote of this chapter demonstrates, Field embraces her position as a ‘stylist’ and the commercial connotations associated with the title. That said, Field has achieved critical respect, both within the trade and popular presses. Moreover, she has become a celebrity in her own right. This is in part due to the (sub)cultural capital she embodied as the owner of a series of boutiques (from 1966- present) in New York, *before* her role as stylist for SATC. This heritage has increased Field’s cultural capital insofar as she is associated with ‘street style’. Indeed, to return to the earlier passage from WWD, it is evident that Field is committed to finding unusual ‘unique’ items – which often emerge from ‘the street’. In a series of ways, ‘street style’ is comparable to ‘folk art’ insofar as it is ‘created by the people.’ It is created within ‘urban subcultures’, and ‘suppl[ies] many of the ideas for fads and trends’.²⁰⁹ Therefore, the emergence of street style problematised previous prominent sociological theories (conceptualised initially by Veblen and Simmel) which suggests that fashion engages in a ‘trickle down’ process.²¹⁰ For Veblen and Simmel, fashion trends were thought to ‘trickle down’ from the upper classes to the lower middle classes stopping short of the working classes (by which time the particular trend was no longer fashionable).²¹¹ This process therefore maintained the symbolic boundaries between the classes. However, ‘street style’ is representative of the ‘trickle up’ or ‘bubble

²⁰⁹ Crane, Fashion and its Social Agendas, p. 135

²¹⁰ Although, it should be noted here that neither the phrase ‘trickle down’, the process was first articulated by Simmel – he termed the concept ‘class differentiation’.

²¹¹ Veblen, A Theory of the Leisure Class, George Simmel (1957) [1904], ‘Fashion’, The American Journal of Sociology, LXII:6 pp. 541-58

up' process.²¹² To put simply, this is essentially a reversal of the 'trickle down' process whereby trends are initiated by 'the people' and move up through the classes before finally being incorporated into high fashion – indeed, a contemporary example of this would be John Paul Gaultier whose collections are often influenced by street subcultural styles.²¹³

According to Patricia Field's website, she has become 'a fashion visionary', 'a true pioneer who has brought forth a new style of dressing to American women and has stimulated an entire fashion movement'.²¹⁴ Indeed, her 'creative shopping' on SATC has inspired numerous trends (as indicated in the introduction to this thesis), and enables her to participate in this 'trickle-up' process of fashion. Therefore, despite the commercial associations, Field has achieved an almost 'auteur' status with regard to her role in SATC. Moreover, within the fashion trade press she is presented as a 'fashion expert' and a dictator of trends. For example, following the season four premiere of SATC in June 2001, an interview with Field featured in WWD which details the fashion that would appear on the show. The article, 'New "Sex" Trends: Pearls, Not Petals', reads: 'the series stylist, Patricia Field – wearing her own white cape, multicoloured leotard and fishnets elaborated on some of the upcoming looks. "Scarves as ankle bracelets, ... and of course, white shoes. When it's chaotic, that's when creativity has its chance."' ²¹⁵ Indeed, this article perfectly demonstrates how Field's styling on SATC engages with the 'trickle up' process insofar as she is positioned as the creator of trends which will both 'trickle up' to high-end designers and 'trickle down' to the audiences of the show. Therefore, Field's status as a stylist has allowed her to transcend from a dictator of 'subcultural' style to arbiter of public taste.

Within the material examined here, it is apparent that the increase of designer clothes in both film and television has altered not only the role of the costume designer and their title, but also their cultural legitimacy. However, as previous academic accounts of the fashion and film demonstrate, costume designers, and indeed wardrobe personnel in general, have long struggled to acquire cultural and economic equality with other creative personnel in the film and television industries. Despite the fact that costumers of the classical period,

²¹² Herbert Blumer (1969) 'Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection', The Sociological Quarterly, 10:3 p. 275-91

²¹³ Indeed, recent work on fashion theory strongly contests the 'trickle down' concept insofar as it fails to take into account 'the fashion pluralism and polycentricism that more and more characterises contemporary dress', Davis, Fashion, Culture and Identity, p. 112

²¹⁴ <http://www.patriciafield.com/aboutpatriciafield.aspx> (accessed 22/01/08)

²¹⁵ Alison Oneacre (1st June 2001) 'New "Sex" Trends: Pearls, Not Petals', www.wwd.com (accessed 28/03/08)

such as Edith Head and Gilbert Adrian, retain a prominent role in discussions of costume design, these, as previously discussed, are exceptional examples which have become canonised in popular and academic discourses.

The contemporary costume designer's struggle for cultural legitimacy demonstrated within the trade press stems from dominant prejudices regarding the cultural legitimacy of contemporary fashion programming. The concerns regarding a lack of agency, and a shift from the production of costume to the consumption of designer garments, are representative of broader concerns that contemporary fashion programming is 'trivial' and 'passive'. However, as demonstrated here, the contradictory discourses which surround the highly contested figure of the television stylist, suggest that this is far more complex. More traditional assumptions which commend the 'labour' of production are challenged here in the testimonies of contemporary costume designers/stylists who suggest that the process of 'meaning-making' is not confined to the production of garments, but the processes of styling – which involves the consumption, mediation and appropriation of dress. While much of the discourse pivots on the understanding that contemporary costume design should continue to 'serve' the picture, there is also a suggestion that the contemporary costumer should be equally concerned with the aesthetic function of onscreen fashion. Indeed, the focus on Patricia Field, within both the fashion and television trade press could therefore be understood as symptomatic of a change within the perceived function of the television stylist. However, Field's visibility in contemporary media could speak to changes in celebrity culture, as opposed to costume design. Indeed, as the next chapter demonstrates, the trade press is equally concerned with the intersection of fashion and celebrity culture.

Chapter Three

Fashion and Television Celebrity: Producing Value and ‘Meaning Transfer’

‘TV creates the celebrity. Then the celebrity sells the clothes’.²¹⁶

The female television celebrity, like the costume designer, is also a central figure in the ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ special editions.²¹⁷ As with the costume designer, the trade press reports a series of industrial, economic and cultural shifts which are considered to have impacted upon the function of the television celebrity with regard to the developing relations between the fashion and television industry. The emphasis on change, and the selective and simplified history of fashion and celebrity presented in the industry discourse, is in itself revealing. The television celebrity as an endorser of fashion products is presented as a new phenomenon. However, as this chapter will show, this is not necessarily the case.

Thus, my aims in this chapter are twofold. First, I offer an analysis of the cultural and economic functions of the contemporary television celebrity within fashion promotion, as narrativised by the trade press. In so doing, I assess the *extent* to which (if at all) the supposed shifts within celebrity culture have altered the nature of the relationship between the fashion industry and celebrity. Second, I demonstrate the ways in which the trade press seeks to offset anxieties which have emerged in relation to these apparent changes in celebrity culture, in an attempt to re-establish the cultural and economic worth of the female television celebrity, and its use-value in the promotion of fashion and material goods. The trade discourse offers some useful insights into the production of the celebrity as a commodity, and also demonstrates the ways in which the television industry understands and manipulates its relationship to the fashion industry for its own ends.

The Glamorisation of the Television Celebrity: Claims of Newness and Change

In the article ‘Small Screen Style’, MTV’s executive producer of fashion programming, Chad Hines notes a change in the relationship between fashion and celebrity culture in the early 1990s. He makes the rather bold claim that the emergence of ‘supermodels’ in the

²¹⁶ Sharon Lee cited in Ginsberg ‘TV Ups the Fashion Quotient’

²¹⁷ It is important to note here that there have been debates regarding the meanings of the terms star and celebrity and often they are assigned to a specific medium (stardom with film, television with celebrity/personality). While I abide by this distinction to avoid confusion, I do not wish to perpetuate the understanding that celebrity is somehow a more fleeting or non-legitimate form of fame.

1990s was a direct result of the lack of glamour associated with Hollywood actors. He asserts '[m]odels became celebrities because the glamour quotient in Hollywood at the time was zilch.'²¹⁸ While Hines' comment here is clearly subjective, he does highlight two interrelated points which preoccupy the trade discourse. First, Hines notes a change in the relationship between Hollywood and the fashion industry. Second, he demonstrates the fashion industry's reliance on the celebrity image.

The trade discourse responds to Hines' claims insofar as it attempts to present the relationship between the fashion industry and celebrities in the contemporary period as successful and economically profitable for both parties. Indeed, following Hines' quote, the article explains that 'Five years on...Hollywood glamour returned with a vengeance. Today's celebrities align themselves with fashion houses and exude tremendous personal style.'²¹⁹ Moreover, as previously discussed in chapter one, images of classical Hollywood stars remain a dominant theme within the trade discourse, and are used to associate the contemporary relationships of fashion and celebrity with more culturally 'legitimate' examples of successful symbiosis (e.g. Audrey Hepburn and Givenchy).

The relationship between fashion and celebrity as described by the trade press is often presented as 'new', or at the very least notably different from previous decades. In the 2003 edition of 'Fashion in Entertainment', the article 'Frock Stars' notes that from the late 1990s onwards designers have felt a greater pressure to create working relationships with celebrities than in previous years. The article cites fashion designer Nanette Lepore (who credits *Sex and the City* for raising public awareness of her name) who claims that 'in the last five years it's become so important to dress celebrities.'²²⁰ Moreover, the same article continues to make the claim that television celebrities in particular have become increasingly important in the promotion of designer fashions:

Abetted by print media covering entertainment, celebrities onscreen have the power to turn designers into stars...That's never been more true than now, with the current crop of shows...offering a particularly eclectic assortment of styles to inspire the masses.²²¹

²¹⁸ Chad Hines (October 19-25, 1999) quoted in Denise Abbott, 'Small-Screen Style', *The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue*, p. S-17

²¹⁹ Abbott, 'Small-Screen Style', p. S-17

²²⁰ Nanette Lepore quoted in Irene Lacher (October 28- November 3, 2000) 'Frock Stars' *The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue*, p. S-17

²²¹ Irene Lacher, 'Frock Stars', p. S-2

Although it is never discussed precisely why the intersection of fashion and celebrity is more important in the contemporary period than previous decades, it is implied that the emergence of fashion programming, the increasing pervasiveness of modern celebrity culture and a growing audience fascination with fashion, are responsible. Indeed, I do not wish to suggest that the emergence of fashion programming had no effect on this relationship however, it is possible that the radical nature of this change has been overstated.

While the early editions of the 'Fashion in Entertainment' special issues contextualise recent developments within a more historical narrative (i.e. classical Hollywood – as demonstrated in chapter one) the trade press offers no such historical context for the television celebrity despite the fact that the television celebrity image has long since been used in advertising and promotional campaigns. For example, Susan Murray, writing about the US context, argues that as early as the post-war period, the ability to promote and increase sales of various commodities was essential to the broadcasting celebrity's persona, and often this included clothing. To be sure, these kinds of celebrity endorsements were not all that glamorous – the most famous examples include television comedian Jackie Gleason promoting his own line of men's shirts for the Manhattan Shirt Company – 'Jackie Gleason Originals' in 1955 - and for the most part the products were ordinary household items associated with everyday life. However, there are similarities in the ways in which the celebrity image was used for the promotion of consumer goods and as such the claims of newness which circulate in the contemporary trade press are somewhat overstated. Indeed, before the television celebrity, the radio personality performed a similar function. Furthermore, a star system based on the marketing strategies of radio celebrities was invoked in the creation of television celebrities. Historically, both TV and radio personalities served to promote not only the programmes in which they appeared, but also sponsor's products and the networks themselves. This was 'essential to broadcasting's economic structure'.²²² Murray claims many television celebrities 'worked in a range of entertainment sites'²²³ (namely radio) before entering television and 'lent [their] image[s]

²²² Susan Murray (2005) *Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom*, London: Routledge, p. 145

²²³ Murray, *Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars*, p. x

to numerous commercial endeavours.’²²⁴ As a result the television celebrity was historically utilised in cross promotion.

The overt commercialism of these endeavours did cause concern for publicity professionals, regarding the cultural worth of the television celebrity, which continue to pervade contemporary popular discourses. Often, the television celebrity’s links with consumer products were more explicit than film or music stars. Film stars for example, sought to ‘simultaneously profit from yet obfuscate the affiliation between stars and the machinations of commercialism.’²²⁵ The economic motivations behind the relationship between television and celebrity endorsements however, were in some ways more apparent. In contrast to film stars of the classical Hollywood era, television celebrities of the 1950s were not considered as arbiters of taste, or style icons. While it has been argued that television did have the capacity to create ‘glamorous’ female celebrities, (for example, several ‘glamorous’ film stars appeared on television),²²⁶ television fame was perceived to be somehow lacking in ‘complexity, depth and cultural value’.²²⁷ Indeed, the economic motivations of the relationships between celebrities and products were considered to be so explicit that the television celebrity was understood as a ‘salesperson’.

This may in part account for the lack of attention given to this period of television history in the trade press, and explains the focus on classical film stars. Given that television is often considered a more commercial medium than film, and that this is often thought to have contributed to its lack of legitimacy, it may have been that the trade press did not wish to situate contemporary fashion programming within this more commercial history. The dominance of film stars within the industry discourse also speaks to these wider concerns which clearly resonate within the trade press. However, there is an attempt to deflect any potential criticisms regarding the cultural value of television celebrities within the contemporary period. For example, the trade press seeks to distance the contemporary television celebrity from the ‘salesperson’ persona and (re)present them as ‘style icons’.

²²⁴ Murray, *Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars*, p. x

²²⁵ Murray, *Hitch Your Antenna to the Star*, p. 146

²²⁶ See Denise Mann (1992) ‘The Spectacularization of Everyday Life: Recycling Hollywood Stars and Fans in Early Television Variety’ in Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (eds) *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, pp. 41-71, Mary Desjardin (2002) ‘Maureen O’Hara’s “Confidential” Life: Recycling Stars through Gossip and Moral Biography’, Janet Thurmin (ed.), *Small Screen, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s*, London: I.B Tauris, pp.118-130

²²⁷ Christine Becker (2005) ‘Television Film Stardom in the 1950s’, *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 46:2, p. 9

The style icon is considered to be an individual with the capacity to create an image or 'look' that inspires fashion trends. Joan Crawford, Marilyn Monroe and Audrey Hepburn were associated primarily with 'looks' as opposed to a brand despite the fact that both Monroe and Hepburn are documented as having created successful relationships with designers (Chanel and Givenchy respectively). These 'looks' became central to the stars' individual personae, contributing to their image construction, and were extremely popular amongst audiences who frequently adopted these styles.

The 'style icon' status was almost exclusively associated with film actresses as opposed to television personalities. Indeed, the television celebrity has often been characterised by his/her connection to everyday life, familiarity and notions of the 'ordinary' which differentiates them from film stardom proper. Indeed, this is often viewed as contributing to their lack of 'star quality'.²²⁸ However, one more historical example of a television celebrity cultivating this kind of fashionable persona is referenced in the trade press. In the article 'Intersecting Patterns', Craig Mattiello (designer for Halston) is among several designers who discuss the intersection between fashion and celebrity. Within his interview, Mattiello acknowledges the effects Hollywood stars have had on fashion and beauty trends in the past. Interestingly, Mattiello is the only one who mentions an historical example of a television actress as a 'fashion icon'. The interview reads:

How many people cut and bleached their hair because of Marilyn Monroe or Carole Lombard? And let's not forget about the influence of TV. When Mary Tyler Moore wore those cigarette pants in the '60s, the audience reacted – more so than to any other "fashion" icon, because celebrities are more accessible to the American public.²²⁹

Mary Tyler Moore is a useful example, for she is regarded as a legitimate star within popular and academic discourses. Her television sitcom, The MTM Show is often considered an example of 'quality' television. Moreover, the show itself was extremely 'fashion conscious' and is often discussed as a precursor for contemporary fashion programming.²³⁰ As such, Moore has subsequently attained cultural legitimacy as both a television star and, as Mattiello's comments make clear, a fashion icon.

²²⁸ See Ellis and Langer

²²⁹ Craig Mattiello in Michael Burr (October 9-15, 2001) 'Intersecting Patterns', The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue, p. S-12

²³⁰ In 1997, an article in the style section of The New York Times reported that ABC had commissioned a spin off from the original series starring Mary Tyler Moore and Valerie Harper as Mary Richards and Rhoda

In the same article, an interview with Emanuel Ungaro refers to contemporary television fashion icons and examples of fashion programming thereby creating a connection with the legitimate stardom of Mary Tyler Moore and contemporary female celebrity. Significantly, he employs a similar rhetoric to Mattiello when describing the impact of these TV celebrities on fashion. He claims:

At the moment, TV shows such as “Sex and the City” influence young women. Sarah Jessica Parker is easily identifiable and the type of young, beautiful, intelligent and independent woman that many young girls can aspire to.²³¹

Both Mattiello and Ungaro’s comments associate the television celebrity with the everyday woman and acknowledge their accessibility. Moreover, within the trade press there appears to be an investment in presenting the television celebrity’s ordinariness as a unique selling point which can be utilised in the promotion of fashion. Rather than equating this ‘everydayness’ with a lack of glamour, the trade press seeks to demonstrate the ways in which the television celebrity can, as the above comments suggest, appeal to consumers. However, an article in the fashion trade press WWD demonstrates that concerns regarding the lack of glamour (and cultural value) of television celebrities as opposed to film stars remain in circulation. However, as the final section of this thesis demonstrates, the developments within fashion programming seek to alter this (somewhat outdated) understanding of television fame. The 2000 article ‘TV ups the Fashion Quotient’ suggests that while lesser known designers will gravitate toward television celebrities, more established brands would rather be associated with film stars. The report claims, ‘that we’re living in a celebrity infused environment. Movie stars have alliances with major designers, so companies like Bebe and BCBG pursue the stars of television, such as the girls on the WB’.²³² Indeed, this shift could be viewed in relation to broader developments between celebrity culture and fashion, as outlined by Rebecca Epstein. In her article ‘Sharon Stone in a Gap Turtleneck’, Epstein explores the ways in which developments within the fashion industry, and female star/fan relationships affect the role of the contemporary fashion icon. She posits that the contemporary preoccupation with designer fashion (as opposed to star fashion) has altered the worth of the female star and her ability

Morgenstern. The report suggested that the show would have a focus on fashion, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/07/style/style-over-substance-toss-your-hat-mary-and-rhoda-return.html?pagewanted=1> (accessed 7/6/10)

²³¹ Emanuel Ungaro cited in Burr, ‘Intersecting Patterns’, p. S-13

²³² Ginsberg, ‘TV Up’s the Fashion Quotient’

to influence fashion trends. That said, she also suggests that '[t]he contemporary moment is eager for Hollywood glamour but wary of its worth'.²³³ Indeed, these tensions between 'glamour' and 'worth' are particularly pertinent within discourses surrounding the television celebrity and the fashion industry.

The Celebrity Image and Cultural Value

It appears that the television trade press is endeavouring to deflect these concerns which resonate within the fashion industry and to promote the benefits of celebrity and fashion fusion. This agenda is established in the opening paragraph of the first issue of the 'Fashion in Entertainment' series which reads:

high fashion and product placement can be more effective than a 10 page advertisement in Harper's Bazaar. Whether it's gowns and jewels at a major Hollywood event or a collection of outfits that creates a star's onscreen persona for a particular film, celebrities' clothes are of infinite interest to the general public- which translates into unlimited potential for big consumer bucks.²³⁴

Moreover, as this comment demonstrates, there is a tendency to present the use of the celebrity image as a necessity in the promotion of fashion - despite the fact that celebrity endorsements are equally important to celebrities themselves insofar as they have become central to the construction of the celebrity image in the contemporary period. This can be viewed as a form of 'risk management'. It is often claimed that the cultural industries 'constitute a particularly risky business'.²³⁵ Drawing on the work of Nicholas Garnham, David Hesmondhalgh claims that 'this risk derives from the fact that audiences use cultural commodities [this includes celebrities] in highly volatile and unpredictable ways'.²³⁶ Furthermore, the consumption practices of the audience cannot be controlled at the level of production. However, there seems to be a need within the cultural industries to appear as though they are managing or containing the risk, regardless of the fact that this is ultimately futile. Despite being an equally risky cultural commodity, the celebrity image is used by other cultural industries to minimise risk. Hesmondhalgh describes how the celebrity image is used as a 'formatting' tool. That is, as a way of supposedly guaranteeing an audience/consumer for a product. The 'Fashion in Entertainment' special editions cannot suggest that the use of celebrity images in fashion promotion will definitely result

²³³ Epstein, 'Sharon Stone in a Gap Turtleneck', p. 216

²³⁴ Penn, 'Clothing the Deal', p. S-3

²³⁵ David Hesmondhalgh (2007) *The Cultural Industries*, London: Sage, p. 18

²³⁶ Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, p. 19

in an increase in sales, however it endeavours to appear that way, and the use of celebrity images in advertising is now commonplace.

In the 2005 issue of 'Fashion in Entertainment', the article 'Stones Sold' examines the contemporary economic motivations behind the relationship between fashion houses and celebrities, and claims that 'celebrities are earning big bucks for agreeing to wear designer duds and diamonds.'²³⁷ The article goes on to reveal specific details of the economic exchanges which have taken place - for example, it reports that Hilary Swank received \$90,000 for wearing Chopard jewellery to the 2005 Oscars. The article suggests that this kind of paid product placement is becoming increasingly popular.

It is important to note here that the term celebrity endorsement is often used as an umbrella term, and it encompasses a wide range of marketing strategies. At this stage, I wish to clarify some of these strategies, as different kinds of celebrity endorsement can have different implications. The Hilary Swank anecdote refers to 'paid product placement' which involves the celebrity accepting payment from a designer/brand to wear a garment or item to an event. This is not to be confused with celebrity endorsements where a celebrity becomes the 'spokesperson' for a product and features in advertising campaigns. Paid product placement, according to the 'Stones Sold' article, is not only an effective marketing strategy, but it is also a necessity for the brand. The article quotes Rose Apodaca (West Coast bureau chief for WWD) who claims:

This whole idea of actually paying celebrities requires an enormous investment for any company, it becomes part of their marketing plan. That does make it more difficult for a smaller designer, unfortunately, because the whole celebrity factor has become so important and validating for a brand's performance.²³⁸

This passage makes clear the importance of the celebrity image on brand performance, and presents the marketing strategy as necessary for brand validation, despite the fact, that as previously discussed, there is no guarantee that the celebrity image can prompt a positive response from consumers. This sentiment is affirmed in an interview with stylist Ricci DeMartino. In the same article, he asserts:

[t]alking about the business of paying someone to wear something, whether it be a gown, shoes, handbags, jewelry [sic]— everyone's interested for a

²³⁷ Minju Pak (October 25-October 31, 2005) 'Stones Sold', The Hollywood Reporter: Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue, p. S-6

²³⁸ Rose Apodaca cited in Pak, 'Stones Sold', p. S-6

reason...Everyone is making money off it, right down to the magazines that are selling issues and stores that are knocking off dresses and selling them to middle America. So it is a huge wheel that goes around and it keeps the whole allure of the industry going.²³⁹

What is significant about these comments is the way in which they understand the function of the celebrity image within these agreements. As previously mentioned, the celebrity image is understood as a necessity for the fashion industry as a way of controlling the risky business of fashion, and here DeMartino attempts to articulate why the celebrity image is key. He claims that they ‘keep the whole *allure* of the industry going’ [my emphasis].²⁴⁰ This suggests that the celebrity lends part of their allure to the product and the industry itself. Indeed, this is what Grant McCracken has termed ‘meaning transfer’. In his 1989 article, ‘Who is the Celebrity Endorser?’ McCracken usefully outlines the processes involved in ‘meaning transfer’. He writes: ‘the endorsement process depends upon the symbolic properties of the celebrity endorser...these properties are shown to reside in the celebrity and to move from the celebrity to consumer good and from good to consumer.’²⁴¹ The paid product placement strategies rely upon a celebrity image to bring a specific set of values and ‘allure’ which the brand itself wishes to be associated with. The celebrity, within this process, is a commodity in itself. That is not to suggest that the contemporary celebrity is *only* a commodity, for as Graeme Turner posits:

Celebrities are brand names as well as cultural icons or identities; they operate as marketing tools as well as sites where the agency of the audience is clearly evident; and they represent the achievement of individualism – the triumph of the human and the familiar – as well as its commodification and commercialism.²⁴²

There is of course a danger in overtly presenting the celebrity as a commodity insofar as it can be detrimental to the celebrity’s symbolic value and suggests a lack of agency.

An alternative method of paid product placement is discussed within the ‘Stones Sold’ article which protects the celebrity’s agency – that is, non paid product placement. Non paid product placement, or ‘gratis’ product placement ‘occurs when a celebrity embraces a product or brand they truly like and visibly uses these products in public’.²⁴³ In her book,

²³⁹ Ricci DeMartino cited in Pak, ‘Stones Sold’, p. S-6

²⁴⁰ DeMartino cited in Pak, ‘Stones Sold’, p. S-6

²⁴¹ Grant McCracken (1989) ‘Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process’ in *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, p. 310

²⁴² Turner et. al., *Fame Games*, p. 13

²⁴³ Uche Okonkwo (2007) *Luxury Fashion Branding: Trends, Tactics, Techniques*, New York: Macmillan, p. 159

Luxury Fashion Branding, Uche Okonkwo describes how ‘gratis’ product placement is becoming less common. She writes ‘[t]his aspect of celebrity endorsement is however becoming rare, as celebrities have got wise to their powerful advantage over consumers and increasingly use this to their own advantage’.²⁴⁴ However, within the ‘Stones Sold’ article, it is revealed that, celebrities will, on occasion, choose to wear smaller, lesser known designer labels to red carpet events for no fee. The example used is Felicity Huffman (Desperate Housewives 2004-), who wore Kevan Hall to the 2005 Emmy Awards. Hall reportedly had ‘virtually no marketing or advertising budget’²⁴⁵ and Huffman’s appearance at the Emmy Awards increased awareness for the relatively unknown designer. Huffman, as a television celebrity, is presented as a useful commodity to designers (particularly new designers) as it suggested that her position as a well known celebrity and her associations with the ‘familiar’ and ‘ordinary’ make her more willing to participate in this kind of ‘gratis placement’ deals than those film stars whose perceived prestige means they can command large sums of money for product placement. Moreover, the lack of commercial agenda on Huffman’s part, demonstrates a sense of agency insofar as she has *chosen* a designer. Her choice has not been dictated by any contractual obligation and therefore she demonstrates some responsibility for her own image. Furthermore, this example of ‘gratis’ product placement increases her cultural legitimacy as a television celebrity as she is distanced from any associations with commercialism.

The concept of ‘gratis’ product placement is mentioned in an earlier edition of The Hollywood Reporter which examines fashion in teen dramas. In the 1999 ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ special edition, the article ‘TV Teen Threads’ suggests that non paid product placement is especially successful with teen audiences. Senior vice president of media relations and promotions for Columbia TriStar television, Paula Askansas, claims that:

[t]he teen audience is difficult to reach... they are less susceptible to advertising. The hard sell can be a turn off. Having TV stars wear a certain brand of clothing sends a subliminal message. The clothes are part of something cool. [The thinking is], if Jennifer Love Hewitt wears Hilfiger so can I.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Okonkwo, Luxury Fashion Branding, p. 159

²⁴⁵ Pak, ‘Stones Sold’, p. S-6

²⁴⁶ Paula Askansas in Abbott, ‘TV Teen Threads’, p. S-25

While the term ‘subliminal’ suggests a simplistic understanding of audience responses to fashion and media, this claim perfectly demonstrates McCracken’s concept of ‘meaning transfer’. It is supposed that a set of values and meanings are transferred from the celebrity and inscribed on the product. Moreover, Askansas foregrounds a sense of familiarity between the celebrity and potential consumer. This appears again in a later comment by Dia Hollenbeck, public relations for Limited Express – a clothing firm who initiated tie-ins with Party of Five (1994-2000), Beverly Hills 90210 (1990-2000) and Suddenly Susan (1996-2000). She claims ‘We’ve also had instances where celebrities - such as Neve Campbell, Tori Spelling and Jenna Elfman - have absorbed the clothing into their personal wardrobes...Jenna was featured in Marie Claire magazine wearing an Express dress, saying it was one of her favourites. That kind of exposure is unbeatable.’²⁴⁷ Both of these comments contribute to the understanding that the celebrities’ association with a product can directly influence sales and present the celebrity image as a form of risk control despite the fact that there is no guarantee that audiences will participate in the ‘meaning transfer’ process.

Perpetuating Myths of Greatness

Throughout the series of ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ special issues there has been a focus on the testimonies of creative personnel within the fashion industry. This is most certainly the case with regard to its coverage of the relationship between fashion and celebrity. Furthermore, this has resulted in a one-sided perspective of the relationship. As previously discussed, The Hollywood Reporter endeavours to promote fashion programming, and television celebrities, to the fashion industry and as such it neglects to fully articulate the ways in which the television industry benefits from the union. Significantly, the trade press refuses to acknowledge that the process of ‘meaning transfer’ can be reciprocal i.e. that meaning can be exchanged from the consumer goods to the celebrity and refuses to acknowledge the manufacturing process of the celebrity image.

Recent developments within celebrity studies have called for the examination of the production of celebrity as well as its consumption. Joshua Gamson, P. David Marshall and Graeme Turner suggest that if scholars focus exclusively on the consumption of celebrity, and neglect to examine its production, there is the danger of simply reaffirming the

²⁴⁷ Denise Abbott, ‘TV Teen Threads’, p. S-25

ideologies of ‘greatness’ which surround the image, rather than interrogating them.²⁴⁸ Indeed, the trade discourse perpetuates these ideologies insofar as it refuses to debate the ways in which the celebrity image is constructed and as such participates in this capitalist production of celebrity. To be sure, the ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ special issues do offer some insights regarding the profitability of the celebrity which perhaps would not circulate in the more popular presses, however ultimately it seeks to preserve the mythology which surrounds the celebrity.

In his article ‘The Assembly Line of Greatness’, Gamson usefully demonstrates that popular discourses of celebrity have sought to both *explain* fame (that is articulate why someone becomes famous) by exposing the industry behind the celebrity, while simultaneously (re)mystifying aspects of its construction. He writes, ‘[t]hrough discussions of images as images, flattery of audiences’ notions of their own knowledge and power and an ironic status [texts] have continued to negotiate [this] tension’.²⁴⁹ This is particularly relevant to the contemporary period insofar as it is often claimed that the twenty-first century has witnessed an increase in celebrity media coverage.²⁵⁰

Of course, significant industrial changes within the film and television industry since the post war period have altered the ways in which these deals are negotiated, and the ways in which the celebrity image is ‘controlled’. As such, the discourse regarding television celebrities in the contemporary period is informed by an entirely different industrial and cultural context. To use Graeme Turner’s definition, ‘it is the pervasiveness of celebrity culture that marks out the contemporary version’,²⁵¹ and sets it apart from historical models of stardom and celebrity. While the studios were responsible for image making and management in the classical era, a series of significant industrial developments have resulted in the decreasing control over the celebrity image. For example, the increasing ubiquity, speed and saturation of new media technologies have contributed to the pervasiveness of the celebrity image. As Turner notes ‘despite the amount of time invested in controlling media visibility, there is a point where media events build up a momentum

²⁴⁸ P David Marshall (1997) *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Gamson, *Claims to Fame*, and Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*

²⁴⁹ Joshua Gamson (2001) ‘The Assembly Line of Greatness: Celebrity in Twentieth-Century America’ in C.L. Harrington & D.D. Bieby, *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 277

²⁵⁰ See Turner and Gamson

²⁵¹ Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, p. 5

of their own. At such points, the celebrity industry too becomes an onlooker'.²⁵² This loss of control has resulted in the celebrity becoming more responsible for their own image than before. It is in this context that the relationship between fashion and celebrity should be considered, as it explains some of the intricacies of the relationship and can contribute to our understanding of celebrity and brand management in the contemporary period. Indeed as the control over the celebrity image no longer lies entirely with an agent, or public relations executives, but rather with the celebrities themselves, endorsement deals, paid and non paid product placement have become central to its construction and maintenance.

The endorsements (in the form of paid advertising) of consumer goods in particular prove useful as they allow celebrities to become associated with a specific set of values represented by an established brand name. Moreover, advertising campaigns often take place over a period of time, and across a range of media sites (print and broadcast), as a result meaning is continually reinforced. Both paid and non paid product placement deals also contribute to this image making, however slightly differently. In these cases, particularly the gratis product placement, the designer garments are contributing to the construction of a lifestyle. One of the claims often made about contemporary celebrity culture is that celebrities' 'private lives will attract a greater public interest than their professional lives.'²⁵³ As a result, the lifestyle of celebrities is increasingly important and gains wide media coverage. The use of designer brands then, in the everyday life of the celebrity conveys meaning about his/her lifestyle.

This is of course, not to suggest that the celebrity is a completely 'blank canvas' devoid of any meaning, for indeed, the celebrity image must have meaning in order to be both economically and culturally valuable. Rather, celebrity endorsement works as an *exchange* of meaning. However, there is no exploration into how the television industry contributes to the creation of this meaning. This results in the celebrity always being to some extent 'unknowable', which is part of their appeal. The trade discourse continues to perpetuate this notion, presumably in an attempt to preserve the cultural value of the celebrity. However, the celebrity image must simultaneously appear 'knowable' insofar as its appeal to audiences and its effects on consumers must be presented as a definite in order make it an appealing commodity for the fashion industry.

²⁵² Turner, Understanding Celebrity, p. 49

²⁵³ Turner, Understanding Celebrity, p. 3

The front covers of the 'Fashion in Entertainment' issues demonstrate the ways in which the trade discourse negotiates this tension. For example, each issue demonstrates the pervasiveness and benefits of celebrity endorsement for the fashion industry. Each front cover uses a celebrity image (usually a shot from a red carpet event) wearing designer fashions and details of the designer. The front page of one issue features Kim Delany (of NYPD Blue (1993-2005)) and inside the cover it reads: 'ON THE COVER: Kim Delaney at the 1999 Emmys, wearing Richard Tyler. Shoes by Jimmy Choo'.²⁵⁴ These covers reveal that the television industry itself has a stake in celebrity endorsement as these front covers contribute to, and participate in, this image construction. Moreover, while the content of the articles seek to (de)mystify the processes of celebrity endorsement, it addresses a readership which seeks to participate/engage in celebrity culture and celebrity fashion, and caters to this audience.

The quote from the fashion trade press publication Women's Wear Daily cited at the opening of this chapter suggests that 'TV creates the celebrity'. However, as demonstrated here, the television trade press offers very little insight into the specific ways in which the TV creates the celebrity. It does however demonstrate its potential to 'sell the clothes'. What these special issues of 'Fashion in Entertainment' do reveal is the way in which the television celebrity is constructed to appeal to the fashion industry.

As I have already suggested, the supposed 'newness' of the television celebrity as a fashion endorser is overstated. However, in suggesting that there has been a change with regard to the female television celebrity and her relationship to fashion, the trade press seeks to reassess/revise the status of the television celebrity. As previously discussed, the television celebrity has long since been considered as subservient to film stardom proper. That is, the television celebrity has traditionally been associated with familiarity, ordinariness and a lack of glamour. However, the trade press attempts to challenge these more traditional assumptions and suggests that the 'everydayness' associated with the television celebrity does not necessarily equate with a lack of glamour.

The television celebrity is constructed as a glamorous, yet 'everyday' individual, and presented as a valuable commodity to the fashion industry. The use of the television celebrity image in the promotion of fashion is in part motivated by the potential economic

²⁵⁴ The Hollywood Reporter Fashion in Entertainment Special Issue (October 19-25 1999) p. S-3

gains (and this is directly referenced in the trade discourse). However, there is also an additional gain (not explicitly expressed within the 'Fashion in Entertainment' special issues), which benefits both the celebrity and the television industry; this is of course, the cultural prestige granted by association with luxury fashion.

I wish to conclude by suggesting that the trade press participates in a glamorisation of the television celebrity in an attempt to increase its prestige and cultural value. In so doing, the trade press uses the television celebrity to increase the cultural value of fashion programming. In some ways then, the trade press engages in a form of 'meaning transfer', insofar as it seeks to associate fashion programming with the cultural prestige and glamour of the contemporary television celebrity. As previous chapters have demonstrated, a major concern within the trade press was the triviality, and lack of cultural legitimacy associated with fashion programming.

As previously discussed, the trade press offers a useful commentary on the relationship between fashion, television and celebrity culture. While it is of course, necessary to bear in mind that these discourses are mediated, as with all extra-textual discourse, the trade press works to create meaning and an ideological identity for texts. In this case, the trade press offers both a commentary on, and contributes to, the construction of an ideological identity, insofar as it fulfils an important role in the legitimation of fashion programming. The following sections then, examine the ways in which texts (and celebrity intertexts) operate in relation to this meaning.

Section Two

Textual Approaches to Fashion, Costume and Narrative

Fashion is rubbish. Watch *Ugly Betty* and you'll realise that fashion is so rubbish, that even programmes that lampoon the fashion industry can be nothing but rubbish. Fashion is the most mainstream preoccupation on earth, and no one is more middle-of-the-road and less original than those who give a toss about it.²⁵⁵

This section continues to engage with discourses of cultural value and the legitimisation of fashion programming as it examines the intersection of fashion, costume and narrative with regard to three specific case studies; *Sex and the City*, *The O.C.* and *Ugly Betty*. The following chapters seek to reassess existing conceptual approaches to onscreen fashion and costume and demonstrate how the above texts challenge previous understandings of onscreen fashion and its relationship to narrative and character. As such, the chapters interrogate specific (but interrelated) debates regarding fashion as both a textual language and a semiotic system within western society.

Fashion and costume function as semiotic systems insofar as they are used as signifiers of meaning and require 'reading' or 'decoding'. For example, in her chapter on film costume, Church Gibson describes how costume 'is read as a signifying element which carries meanings or creates emotional effects, particularly in relation to character.'²⁵⁶ Similarly as Hollows notes, fashion creates 'not only gendered identities but also classed, "racial", age and ethnic identities'.²⁵⁷ Moreover, she suggests that 'in our everyday lives we are often very skilled at reading cultural identities'.²⁵⁸ Indeed, recent attitudes toward fashion and identity require individuals to become extremely sophisticated in 'reading' fashion given that postmodern thought suggests that identities are made and remade primarily through image management. This supposed cultural turn has broader implications for fashion and indeed costume which this thesis endeavours to address.

In her influential article, 'Costume and Narrative', Gaines is concerned with 'the constraint on screen design in terms of the antithetical relation between costume and narrative'.²⁵⁹ She thus suggests that, in the classical era 'costume was severely restricted in what it was

²⁵⁵ Nirpal Dhaliwal (10th January 2007) 'Had a Charisma Bypass? Then You Must Be a Fashionista.' *Evening Standard*, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Had+a+charisma+bypass%3f+Then+you+must+be+a+fashionista%3b+CITY+LIVES.-a0157209943> (accessed 28/07/10)

²⁵⁶ Church Gibson, 'Film Costume', p. 39

²⁵⁷ Hollows, *Femininity, Feminism and Popular Culture*, p. 137

²⁵⁸ Hollows, *Femininity, Feminism and Popular Culture*, p. 137

²⁵⁹ Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative', p. 180

allowed to “tell”.”²⁶⁰ Similarly, writing in 1952, Alice Evans Field describes how costumes must be:

harmonized to the mood, be it comedy, tragedy or romance; they must add subtly to the *grace* of the wearer; and they must enhance the rhythmic flow of the story. Never must they call undue attention to themselves, unless for sharp definition of character, and they must have originality of detail within the certain bounds of good taste.²⁶¹ [emphasis in original]

Both Gaines and Field demonstrate how concerns that costume could in some way ‘disrupt’ the economy of narrative flow preoccupied filmmakers within the classical era. Moreover, as the above passage suggests, these concerns were connected to anxieties around ‘taste’. Costume was expected to abide by the logic of ‘good taste’, which points to the complex value systems that costume was required to negotiate.

However, more recent developments within film and television studies suggest that value systems which privilege narrative over *mise-en-scene* are now defunct. Indeed, in his discussion of ‘postmodern television’, Kellner argues that ‘the signifier has been liberated and the image takes precedence over narrative’.²⁶² In addition, developments within feminist theory have acknowledged the gendered nature of this dichotomy and called for its revision. That said, as chapter two demonstrates, there remains scepticism regarding the use of more ‘spectacular’ fashion, which is viewed by some as ‘inappropriate’.²⁶³

A similar debate is waged within fashion theory. For example, it is often claimed that functionalist critiques of fashion privilege ‘a “natural” form of dress - which reveal[s] the body for what it [is]’²⁶⁴ - over ‘ornate’, ‘spectacular’ clothing. Therefore, just as appropriate costume is considered to be that which *serves* the character, appropriate fashion is that which is ‘expressive’ of identity rather than ‘excessive’ (which it thought to obscure the identity of the wearer). However, postmodern fashion theorists have rejected this school of thought. They challenge the notion of a ‘natural’ form of dress, ‘exposing

²⁶⁰ Gaines, ‘Costume and Narrative’, p. 181

²⁶¹ Alice Evans Field (1952) “Costume Design”, Hollywood U.S.A.: From Script to Screen, New York: Vantage p. 115

²⁶² Kellner, Media Culture, p. 235

²⁶³ This, of course echoes familiar critiques of postmodern texts (and selves), outlined in the introduction to this thesis, which suggest that the contemporary preoccupation with the visual results in a ‘flattening of the image’.

²⁶⁴ Llewellyn Negrin (1999) ‘The Self as Image: A Critical Appraisal of Postmodern Theories of Fashion’, Theory, Culture and Society, 16:3 p. 99

“the natural” as a Western cultural construct’.²⁶⁵ In addition, they suggest that the functionalist rejection of ‘ornate’ clothing has ‘denied the legitimacy of the aesthetic pleasures derived from dress.’²⁶⁶ Moreover, by demonstrating the complex relationship between fashion and identity, recent postmodern scholarship on fashion has used this emerging body of work as a form of leverage in their battle to win critical respect for the discipline.

These debates are pertinent to our understanding of the function of onscreen fashion insofar as they raise important questions with regard to fashion programming which this section seeks to address. These include: does the supposed current preoccupation with the visual over narrative manifest itself textually? If so, how? Does fashion serve character? And, to what extent are notions of ‘taste’, and its boundaries, challenged and negotiated in fashion programming? In answering these questions I seek to gain an understanding into the ways in which fashion operates within these shows; and revisit and reassess previous conceptual approaches to costume. However, in order to do so one must take into account the specificities of television form.

Indeed, television scholars have long debated the precise parameters of the text, given that often when programmes are broadcast they are introduced into a flow, making it difficult to clearly extract the text. Moreover, the television text is additionally problematic to analyse, given that many programmes form part of a long running series. This then, also raises the question, what is an adequate amount of television to study to serve as a representation (a scene, a programme, a season or an entire series)?

In an attempt to negotiate these limitations, I consult a range of episodes (across a number of series) to offer a thorough representation of the narrative and aesthetic concerns of the case studies examined here. While I have selected certain key episodes for more rigorous analysis in order to enrich the arguments made here, it should also be noted that these episodes are not singled out because they are in some way extraordinary. Rather, I believe that they are indicative of the shows as a whole. In other words, each of the case studies are long running series’ with continuing narratives, and thus the character and narrative development within specific episodes contribute to the construction of the overall

²⁶⁵ F.E Mascia-Lees and P. Sharpe (1992) *Tattoo, Torture, Mutilations and Adornment: The De-Naturalisation of the Body in Culture and Text*, Albany: Statue University of New York Press, p. 3

²⁶⁶ Negrin, ‘The Self as Image’, p.107

generic/aesthetic identity of the show. Indeed, the episodes examined here have been selected because they are particularly demonstrative of some of the key debates/issues which I argue are characteristic of fashion programming. For example, in Chapter Four, I have identified a particular narrative trope (the shopping scene) which is regularly used throughout all six seasons of SATC, and selected specific episodes to demonstrate the varying ways in which this key narrative device can be used.

Chapter Four

Sex and Shopping: Fashion, Spectacle and Narrative

If one aspect of the show epitomizes its courageousness and outrageousness, it's the fashion... The clothes can be so fantastical it can be hard to believe that anyone would wear them in real life.²⁶⁷

In a 2002 issue of Vogue, Sarah Jessica Parker was asked to describe the importance of fashion within Sex and the City. She made the now often repeated claim that 'Fashion is the Fifth character'.²⁶⁸ Parker's assertion suggests that the onscreen fashion is somehow elevated beyond mise-en-scene, and that it holds a privileged position within the show. Parker's claim has subsequently been investigated in an article by Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson which focuses on the relationship between fashion, character and narrative. In their article, Bruzzi and Church Gibson suggest that SATC 'inverts the normative relationship between script and costume... [where traditionally] costume serves character and action not vice versa'.²⁶⁹

This chapter seeks to revisit this assumption regarding the relationship between fashion/costume and narrative. While, to an extent, I agree with Bruzzi and Church Gibson's claims, I argue that SATC does more than this. Not only does it subvert those traditional screen hierarchies which privilege narrative over mise-en-scene, but in some cases it rejects them entirely by intertwining fashion with the narrative. Moreover, I wish to suggest that the costuming in SATC can be read as subverting the deeply gendered nature of the costume/narrative dichotomy and in so doing provides a useful lens through which to examine precisely how discourses of feminism, fashion and costume are manifested textually within this example of fashion programming.

In her article 'Redressing the Balance', Church Gibson acknowledges that despite a perceived 'gradual relaxation of feminist attitudes to dress...there remains a continuing scepticism, even hostility towards fashion within certain strands of feminism'.²⁷⁰ Indeed, this scepticism underlines some feminist critiques of SATC and its preoccupation with fashion and consumerism. As Deborah Jermyn has noted, the show proves problematic for some because it presents women as 'still ultimately consumed by the twin desires to shop

²⁶⁷ Sohn, Kiss and Tell, p. 67

²⁶⁸ Sarah Jessica Parker cited in Sally Singer (February 2002) 'Manhattan Rhapsody', Vogue, p. 234

²⁶⁹ Bruzzi & Church Gibson, "Fashion is the Fifth Character", p. 115

²⁷⁰ Church Gibson, 'Redressing the Balance', p. 349

and find Mr Right.’²⁷¹ Building on Jermyn’s work, this chapter also seeks to demonstrate that SATC fosters a much more complex and contradictory relationship to fashion and consumption than critics of the show would suggest. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the show’s ‘shopping scenes’, which I view as a key narrative trope of SATC, almost as regular as the ‘chat-and-chew’ and ‘think-and-type’ scenes.²⁷² Moreover, I assert that the ‘shopping scenes’ are central to the show’s wider agenda which, I would argue, seeks to interrogate and ultimately challenge assumptions that fashion is trivial and inconsequential.

As such, this chapter begins with a general overview of the debates regarding costume and narrative with regard to SATC before analysing specific examples of ‘shopping scenes’ which occur throughout the six seasons.

‘Self-conscious Spectacularity’: Fashion as a Textual Language

In the first two seasons of SATC, fashion, it has been claimed, worked as costume in the more traditional sense (i.e. it ultimately ‘served’ narrative and characterisation). Bruzzi and Church Gibson note how, in season one, fashion worked alongside character to establish and communicate the different personalities of the four main leads. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, costume designer Patricia Field boasted that she’d even assigned favourite designers to each character. Moreover, Carrie’s monologue about ‘New York women’ in the pilot episode (in which she asserts, ‘they travel. They pay taxes. They’ll spend \$400 on a pair of Manolo Blahnik strappy sandals’) makes clear that fashion is bound up with identity construction and will thus be used to establish character within the show. Equally, however, both Carrie’s monologue and Field’s comments demonstrate how the show sought to appeal to a ‘fashion savvy’ audience from its inception. This appeal is fostered throughout the series and from season three onwards it seems that the fashion developed ‘its own independent existence within the series, and bolstered by various extra-diegetic factors, has acquired a separate momentum’.²⁷³

The impact of the show’s fashion is widely acknowledged in the ‘quality’ press with numerous articles demonstrating its apparent influence on consumers. An entire article in

²⁷¹ Jermyn, Sex and the City, p. 8

²⁷² These two terms were coined by the crew to describe the scenes which appear at least once in every episode – the chat-and-chew scenes feature all four principles in a restaurant or coffee shop discussing a particular topic. Similarly the ‘think-and-type’ scenes feature Carrie typing her column, during which her inner monologue will pose questions which usually preoccupy the narrative of that particular episode.

²⁷³ Bruzzi & Church Gibson, “‘Fashion is the Fifth Character’”, p. 123

the Daily Telegraph, for example, detailed a journalist's attempts to track down and purchase 'the most wanted handbag in America',²⁷⁴ a handbag she had seen in a photograph of SJP on the set of SATC. Similarly, a 'think piece' in the Washington Post reports on how retailers believe the show is responsible for an increase in sales of 'forward fashions' which, the article claims, can be difficult to sell to the general public.²⁷⁵ During its six season run, the show became a 'gatekeeper' of fashion insofar as 'it observe[s] innovations and decide[s] what is fashion and what is not, or what is ephemeral and what will endure'.²⁷⁶ The show itself works as part of 'a process of dissemination',²⁷⁷ within which fashion choices are made known.

This is not to suggest that fashion works solely as product placement here, nor that its position as product placement 'disrupts' the narrative. Rather, it becomes central to, and enmeshed within, the narrative. In an interview for WWD Patricia Field claimed, 'We work side by side with the script people. They started in the second season to write for our wardrobe'.²⁷⁸ Not only does this indicate that, in the case of SATC, narrative does not dictate the wardrobe: it also challenges the notion inherent in previous scholarship that narrative and spectacle are somehow antithetical. Here, it is clear that the writers for SATC consider fashion as an *essential* part of the narrative economy.

The shift during season two was characterised as a more 'spectacular' approach to fashion which was again noted in the press. In the Telegraph Magazine, Tim Banks writes:

[T]here has been criticism of the show mainly along the lines of having wandered too far from its origins and ended up as parody, rather than social satire. It is undeniable that the styling of *Sex* has grown increasingly extreme over its three season run. While the look of the first episodes was low key...by the third season opener, the women were striking a ghetto-fabulous chord in sheared mink, silver fox and chinchilla.²⁷⁹

Banks demonstrates an uneasiness regarding the shift, and he seems to view its more 'spectacular' fashion as problematic. This chimes in with more traditional concerns regarding spectacle and narrative which condemned 'spectacular' costume as a source of

²⁷⁴ Victoria Lambert (July 4th 2001) 'Horseplay with a Handbag', Daily Telegraph, p. 15

²⁷⁵ Robin Givhan (January 9th 2004) 'Sex and the City Gives High Style a Leg Up', Washington Post, www.washingtonpost.com (accessed 10/3/08)

²⁷⁶ Kawamura, Fashion-ology, p. 80

²⁷⁷ Kawamura, Fashion-ology, p. 80

²⁷⁸ Field cited in Jessica Kerwin (12th May 2000) 'Sex Scores in the City', Women's Wear Daily, www.wwd.com (accessed 28/4/08)

²⁷⁹ Tim Banks (2nd December 2000) 'Putting the Sex into the City', Telegraph Magazine, p. 28

narrative ‘disruption’. While productive enquiries into the relationship between spectacle and narrative with regard to action cinema illustrate that often ‘narrative and spectacle “intermesh” in action sequences’,²⁸⁰ it seems that fashion as spectacle is still perceived as a problem. This points to the gendered nature of the debate, and says something about the notions of ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ spectacle within the audio-visual text which circulate within academia. Action, coded as a male genre, provides moments of ‘appropriate’ spectacle. Fashion, a feminine concept, remains ‘inappropriate’ and ‘disruptive’. Moreover, it appears that ‘spectacle’ in general poses a problem for the medium of television. Whereas film holds a privileged relationship with ‘spectacle’, television as a domestic medium is primarily associated with ‘ordinariness’ and ‘realism’ (discourses which are the apparent antitheses of spectacle).

SATC perhaps offsets some of these concerns due to its status as ‘quality’ television and its connections to the ‘cinematic’ (in terms of visual style and ‘production values’). The emergence of this discursive category and its preoccupation with the ‘visual’ perhaps creates a space for ‘appropriate’ spectacle in television. However, this is still confined to more masculine TV genres insofar as academic debates regarding spectacle and quality TV are often applied to shows like 24 (2001-2010) and The Sopranos (1999-2007).²⁸¹ While SATC’s ‘fantastical’ clothes are celebrated by female fans of the show, they have also been the subject of ridicule within wider discourses.²⁸² Perhaps in response to this negativity, SATC has employed a method of costuming which, according to Bruzzi and Church Gibson, demonstrates a ‘self-conscious spectacularity’.²⁸³

At times this self-conscious approach to fashion and spectacle results in moments of spectacle actually being commented on within the narrative, thereby drawing attention to its construction. These moments could be understood as a response to the criticism of the spectacular fashion. For example, in ‘The Good Fight’ (season four, episode 13) Carrie helps an elderly neighbour, Mrs Cohen (Francine Beers), down the stairs of her apartment

²⁸⁰ Tico Romo (2004) ‘Guns and Gas: Investigating the 1970s Car Chase Film’ in Yvonne Tasker (ed) Action and Adventure Cinema, London: Routledge, p. 143

²⁸¹ See Steven Peacock (2007) ‘Status and Style’ in Steven Peacock (ed) Reading 24: TV Against the Clock, London: I.B Tauris, pp. 25-35 Franco Ricci (2006) ‘Aesthetic and Ammunition: Art Imitating Life, Life Imitating Art in The Sopranos’ in David Lavery (eds) Reading The Sopranos, London: I.B Tauris, pp. 139-163

²⁸² In the show’s official companion (Kiss and Tell) SJP recalls how the ‘Heidi’ dress in season two episode 13 (‘The Fuck Buddy’) was criticised in the press for being ‘too extreme and self conscious’ p. 70

²⁸³ Bruzzi & Church Gibson, ‘Fashion is the Fifth Character’, p. 123

building. Instead of thanks, Mrs Cohen turns to face Carrie (who is wearing a blue boob tube and navy pencil skirt) and says ‘That’s a crazy outfit’. Carrie does not respond verbally, but simply rolls her eyes as if she’s heard it all before. Another example occurs in season six. During a fight with boyfriend Jack Berger (Ron Livingston), in the episode ‘Pick a Little, Talk a Little’ (season six, episode four), Berger insults Carrie’s hat. To which Carrie responds ‘it’s fabulous and you only said that to hurt me.’

The self-conscious approach to costuming in SATC is not exclusively confined to these moments, but can also be seen in the way in which the show seeks to challenge notions of ‘taste’.²⁸⁴ To use Bourdieu’s well-known definition, ‘tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference’²⁸⁵ and while Alice Evan Field (cited in the introduction to this section) describes how costuming, in the traditional sense, was contained ‘within the certain bounds of good taste’,²⁸⁶ Patricia Field’s approach to costuming signals a ‘difference’ in attitudes toward taste and the way in which costume is expected to express it. Moreover, Bourdieu usefully observes that ‘tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror...of the tastes of others.’²⁸⁷ Indeed, responses to the show, such as Banks’ cited above, reveal that Field’s costuming choices were often subject to criticism, or questioning by certain sections of the audience. Similarly, when discussing Field’s involvement in the show, Parker claimed ‘I knew the fashion on the show had to be special. It didn’t mean that people would like it, but it had to be special.’²⁸⁸ Parker’s comments therefore, suggest that Field did not seek to appeal to the ‘mass’ audience, but rather a specific subsection, those with an ‘aesthetic disposition’ - that is, the ability to read the costuming ‘in terms of *form over function*’²⁸⁹ [emphasis in original].

Field’s attempts to interrogate and push the boundaries of taste are perhaps most apparent in the continual use of the Manolo Blahnik sandal – which has since become synonymous with the show. According to Sarah Niblock, Blahnik is known for ‘challenging notions of taste, his sequin-and-feather-encrusted creations are a direct assault on the traditional,

²⁸⁴ Bourdieu, Distinction, p. 56

²⁸⁵ Bourdieu, Distinction, p. 56

²⁸⁶ Evans Field ‘Costume Design’, p. 115

²⁸⁷ Bourdieu, Distinction, p. 56

²⁸⁸ Parker in Sohn, Kiss and Tell, p. 67

²⁸⁹ Bourdieu, Distinction, p. 29

sedate notion of what a status item should be.²⁹⁰ Similarly, the garments described in Banks' article are associated with a specific notion of 'inappropriate' spectacle and excess. Fur, for example is often the subject of ethnical debates in fashion. In addition, it is associated with the 'vulgar' display of wealth. In his work on 'Conspicuous Consumption', Veblen suggests that women of the leisure class served to represent the wealth of their husband, and that she 'carries on the business of vicarious leisure for the good name of the household and its master'.²⁹¹ The women in SATC can be considered as 'conspicuous consumers' insofar as they use 'their new found economic power to embrace fashion and lifestyle'.²⁹² However, the key difference here is, precisely that it is *their* economic power. They are not representing a *master's* wealth, but their own. The fur coats, which are a dominant presence in season three become, when read in this context, a comment on 'taste' and appropriate dress.

This 'appropriation' of fashion is central to the costuming in SATC, and despite claims that season three marked a definite change in costuming, this has been apparent from the pilot episode. In particular, the use of Carrie's nameplate necklace demonstrates the way in which Field sought to take an item out of its original context and place it in a new one.²⁹³ In the show's official companion book, Field remarks on her use of the nameplate necklace: 'It's nothing unusual, but it wasn't in the white world, so we put it on Sarah Jessica'.²⁹⁴ While, the raiding of black culture, and its commercial popularisation in the 'white world' has problematic connotations, the show seeks to frame this costuming decision within the postmodern thought which encourages this kind of re-appropriation/bricolage. Indeed, it is Carrie's costuming in particular which allows for Field to exercise this kind of freedom, insofar as it works to reflect her character; Carrie engages in these kinds of fashion practices within the narrative and is presented as the most 'fashion conscious' and 'fashion savvy' of the four female leads. For example, in the episode 'Where There's Smoke' (season three, episode one) when considering dating a politician, Carrie's internal monologue reveals 'He was adept at politics, I was adept at

²⁹⁰ Sarah Niblock (2004) 'My Manolos, My Self': Manolo Blahnik, Shoes and Desire' in Kim Akass and Janet McCabe in Reading Sex and the City, London: I.B. Tauris, p. 145

²⁹¹ Thorstein Veblen (2000) [1925] 'Conspicuous Consumption' in Martyn J. Lee (ed) The Consumer Society Reader, London: Blackwell, pp. 37-38

²⁹² Jermyn, Sex and the City, p. 4

²⁹³ The nameplate necklace which was made popular by the show, is often used as an example to demonstrate the show's influence over fashion trends.

²⁹⁴ Field quote in Sohn, Sex and the City: Kiss and Tell, p. 158

fashion. Both of these involve mixing up old ideas and coming up with something new and different.’ As these comments make clear, the show celebrates fashion as a process of ‘bricolage’ and suggests that it is a skill that requires a specific set of cultural competences.

‘Conspicuous Consumption’: Shopping in SATC

The fashion in SATC is concerned with notions of performativity and spectacle. This is of course not new. Charlotte Brunsdon for example, has argued with regard to cinema that a series of ‘women’s films’ emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s which were preoccupied with the performance and constructedness of femininity.²⁹⁵ She refers to this collection of films as ‘Shopping films’, precisely because of their key narrative trope - a shopping scene. These films can be viewed as precursors to SATC given their focus of fashion and femininity. However, I wish to suggest here that there are subtle textual differences between this category of film and SATC and that this is reflected in the representation and function of shopping scenes. In Brunsdon’s analysis of Working Girl (1988) and Pretty Woman (1990), she demonstrates how the function of the shopping scene is informed by a ‘post-feminist’ logic. These ‘shopping scenes’ perform a similar function to the makeover and the ‘Cinderella narrative’, which have long since been a staple of the women’s film since the 1940s, insofar as they provide a space in which debates regarding the constructedness and performativity of femininity are enacted and worked through.²⁹⁶ In addition, these shopping scenes can also serve to ‘educate’ and inform audiences about fashion and consumption practices. Brunsdon writes how these films are representative of the ‘rediscovery of the pleasures of feminine consumption’²⁹⁷ which she characterises as postfeminist.

Brunsdon’s analysis of Pretty Woman, for example demonstrates how Vivian is able to ‘try on identities’,²⁹⁸ however she also notes that while Vivian is able to participate in fashion practices which allow her to construct and manipulate her identity, ultimately her ‘natural’ identity is privileged. While the concept of a ‘natural’ femininity has been rejected by more recent feminist scholars, arguing that the ‘natural’ self is also a construct, this body of films, as Hollows has argued, seeks to ‘naturalise’ femininity. In other words, Vivian’s

²⁹⁵ Brunsdon, Screen Tastes

²⁹⁶ See Rachel Moseley (2005) ‘Dress, Class and Audrey Hepburn: The Significance of the Cinderella Story’ in Rachel Moseley (ed) Fashioning Film Stars: Dress Culture and Identity, London: BFI, pp. 109-121

²⁹⁷ Charlotte Brunsdon (1997) Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes, London & New York: Routledge, p. 85

²⁹⁸ Brunsdon, Screen Tastes, p. 86

transformation, is less about constructing an identity for her to adopt, but is rather about ‘revealing’ her natural self. Therefore, these ‘shopping films’ and indeed classical ‘women’s films’ such as Now Voyager (1942) seek to both reveal the constructedness of femininity, but also, somewhat contradictorily perpetuate the notion of a ‘natural’ self.

As with the shopping films of the 1980s and 1990s, the performance of femininity is foregrounded and thought to be enjoyed by SATC’s audience and as the following section shall illustrate, SATC also fosters this contradictory relationship to dress and the ‘natural self’. The main difference between the show and its precursors that I wish to highlight here, is connected to spectacle and its relationship to narrative. In Pretty Woman for example, Vivian’s second shopping experience on Rodeo Drive (the first was a disaster) is signalled as a moment of spectacle. It is a montage sequence with little dialogue and extra-diegetic music (Roy Orbison’s ‘Pretty Woman’) during which Vivian ‘can try on identities and adopt them’.²⁹⁹ Arguably, Vivian’s function in this scene is ‘to-be-looked-at’ and the lack of dialogue reinforces that these moments do not exist simply to forward narrative. The shopping sequences in SATC, I would argue are not singled out as moments of spectacle,³⁰⁰ and Carrie is not so much an object to-be-looked-at as she is the holder of the gaze, with the desire to look at the commodities for sale. In so doing, SATC challenges early feminist criticism which views fashion as bound up with and ultimately responsible for the objectification of women. As Church Gibson notes ‘the “aesthetics” of fashion are not primarily sexual in nature, nor are they designed, necessarily, to attract the male gaze’.³⁰¹ Rather, she writes ‘fashionable dress is a complex lexicon where the intention of sexual enticement may be absent altogether, or, if present, be unimportant in comparison to other criteria’.³⁰² Indeed, with regard to SATC, this marks a departure from the ‘desire to find Mr Right’ narrative structure.

This is not to suggest that the shopping scenes cannot function as ‘spectacle’, but rather I am suggesting here that these moments are often central to the narrative focus of each specific episode. Moreover, these shopping sequences demonstrate the precise ways in which fashion as spectacle is enmeshed within the narrative insofar as these particular scenes use fashion and consumption practices as a *metaphor* for the narrative.

²⁹⁹ Brunsdon, Screen Tastes, p. 86

³⁰⁰ Interestingly, Sex and the City: The Movie (2008) does include scenes which are signalled as spectacle – the Vogue scene and the packing up the wardrobe scene.

³⁰¹ Church Gibson, ‘Redressing the Balance’, p. 350

³⁰² Church Gibson, ‘Redressing the Balance’, p. 350

Femininity, Fashion and Shopping

In 'Attack of the Five Foot Ten Woman' (season three, episode three) Carrie learns that her ex-boyfriend 'Mr Big' (Chris Noth) has married his 25 year old girlfriend, Natasha (Bridget Moynahan). When discussing the news with Charlotte (Kristin Davis), Carrie becomes upset and claims that Natasha makes her feel inadequate. Carrie describes Natasha, somewhat inarticulately, as 'shiny hair...style section...Vera Wang', thereby associating Natasha with a specific version of traditional femininity. Vera Wang is known for her 1950s inspired designs, and perhaps most importantly is associated primarily with wedding gowns. For Carrie, Natasha embodies (if only visually) a version of domestic femininity which, as a single 30 something, Carrie has apparently rejected. Their difference is central to the narrative in this episode and is played out in a shopping scene where Carrie and Natasha meet. The scene begins with Carrie and Miranda (Cynthia Nixon) in an unspecified clothes shop discussing Miranda's cleaning lady who had recently given her a rolling pin. The pair continue to debate whether they should feel guilty for refusing to perform these kinds of traditional domestic chores as Carrie tries on a dress in the changing room. During this conversation, Miranda spots Natasha (also in the changing room) while Carrie is out of sight behind a curtain. Carrie then emerges from her cubical in her underwear holding an electric blue dress (as she needs a different size). She is completely unprepared (and inappropriately attired) for her encounter with Natasha, who is notably trying on a conservative white cotton dress. The costuming within this scene works to highlight the different femininities that each character performs. Natasha's associations with a 1950s version of ideal domestic femininity are evidenced by her costuming. The colour, or absence of colour, not only creates a 'bridal' look but also connotes an absence of 'personality' and 'individuality'. Conversely, Carrie's mismatched underwear and electric blue dress connote her 'individuality' and 'quirkiness'.

In the following scenes, Carrie attempts to compete with Natasha and decides to attend a 'Women in the Arts' function which Natasha is organising. It becomes apparent in a 'chat-and-chew' scene with Charlotte that Carrie purchased a new pair of shoes to wear to the event and plans to buy a dress (which she cannot afford) in an attempt to repair the damage to her self-esteem. However, Carrie's renewed self confidence is only temporary. When she arrives at the function, Carrie is told that Natasha is unable to attend. As she enters the function room she remarks 'I charged another outfit I can't afford...just to prove I'm

amazing and I've never felt less so.' Ultimately, the episode seeks to demonstrate that Carrie's attempts to manipulate her own feminine identity through dress are fruitless and that she should celebrate her 'natural' identity – despite the fact that Carrie's 'natural' identity is shown to be constructed through dress. In other words, as with the shopping films of the 1980s and 1990s, the episode demonstrates that while fashion allows Carrie the opportunity to 'try on and adopt identities', the show does in fact perpetuate the notion that Carrie somehow has an 'inner' feminine identity which is 'fixed'. Of course, it could also be argued that Natasha's conventional, domestic feminine identity represents more a 'modernist' version of identity (thought to be shaped by more rigid 'traditional' gender roles), which Carrie resists. Thus, it is Carrie's quirkiness, individuality (and ability to complicate/negotiate the boundaries of 'gendered' identities) which are ultimately privileged and presented as part of her 'natural' self. The identity she attempted to perform as a response to her encounter with Natasha is 'inauthentic'.

The construction of identity and the performance of femininity are challenged in a later episode in season four. In the episode 'Change of a Dress' (season four, episode, 15) Carrie begins to have second thoughts about her recent engagement to her boyfriend Aidan. In an attempt to help Carrie confront her fears, Miranda suggests that she and Carrie visit a bridal gown shop and try on the worst dresses available. In the following scene the pair emerge from their changing cubicles to reveal their dresses. Miranda, heavily pregnant at the time, wears a tight white gown with enormous puffed sleeves which she jokes 'balances out her stomach'. Carrie wears an ornate high necked, beaded dress with an extremely large netted skirt. While the pair initially laugh hysterically at each other's appearance, when Carrie turns to face her reflection she suffers a panic attack. Miranda is forced to rip open the back of the dress to reveal Carrie's back which is covered in a red rash. Following the unsuccessful shopping trip, Carrie concludes that she is allergic to the thought of being a bride. The episode is therefore preoccupied with the performance of traditional domestic femininity. In her attempts to perform what she considers to be an appropriate version of femininity, Carrie is reminded here that her 'authentic' identity is her position as single woman. When she attempts to conform to a different form of femininity she is unsuccessful.

Carrie is reminded of this lesson in the episode 'An American Girl in Paris, Part Une' (season six, episode 19). As the title suggests, the narrative revolves around Carrie's move

to Paris with boyfriend Aleksandr Petrovsky; in particular, it depicts her struggles to assimilate. In an attempt to feel more at home in Paris, Carrie decides to go shopping. In a moment of ‘screwball’ inspired comedy typical of the show, Carrie enters the Dior boutique slipping on a puddle of water and slides head first into the store. The bird’s eye view of Carrie spread-eagled on the floor with her belongings scattered around her demonstrates the magnitude of the fall. The camera then cuts to the faces of several sophisticated Parisian women who look disapprovingly at Carrie as she attempts to get up from the floor. Not only does this scene demonstrate Carrie’s inability to perform appropriate sophisticated feminine behaviour, but the repercussions further serve as a reminder to Carrie, that her ‘authentic’ identity does not belong in Paris. When she arrives back at the hotel it becomes apparent that during her fall in Dior, she misplaced her iconic ‘Carrie’ necklace. The necklace, as she explains to Alex, was not valuable (in the economic sense), but it was representative of who she was.

In each of these examples, the shopping scenes provide a space for narrative concerns to be brought to the fore; serving as a metaphor for the unfolding action. As with the ‘shopping’ film, these scenes reveal what Brunsdon terms ‘the labour of femininity... [that is] the difficulty of successfully inhabiting this contradictory position’.³⁰³ These shopping scenes perform the dual function of demonstrating the possibilities of ‘trying on’ a variety of feminine identities, but ultimately reveal the difficulty in sustaining and perpetuating those constructed identities. Indeed, these scenes serve as an ideological critique of the supposed flexibility offered by postmodern notions of identity performance while simultaneously celebrating the supposed ‘freedom’ offered by consumption.

Femininity, Responsible and Irresponsible Consumption

Throughout its six seasons, *SATC* has often reflected on the consumption practices of women. In particular, it has raised a series of issues regarding the concept of the ‘irresponsible’ consumer. These debates are mobilised as early as season one in ‘The Power of Female Sex’ (season one, episode five). In the opening scenes of the episode, Carrie decides to go shopping, or as her monologue describes: ‘I decided to investigate this theory I had about shopping as a way to release the creative subconscious.’ The camera cuts from the outside of a Dolce and Gabbana store to the interior, and then pans along a

³⁰³ Brunsdon, *Screen Tastes*, p. 101

selection of shoes on display before focussing on Carrie's feet trying on a pair of sandals. She makes the decision to buy the shoes only to find out that her credit card has been declined and subsequently destroyed by the shop assistant. Carrie's embarrassment is short lived as an old female friend, Amalita (Carole Davis) (who is described in the episode as 'a professional girlfriend') buys her the shoes. In the following scenes, Carrie becomes involved with a European architect (Gil) who, after they sleep together leaves her \$1000. The question posed within the episode (and Carrie's column that week) is: 'where's the line between professional girlfriend and just plain professional?' In the remainder of the episode Carrie contemplates adopting Amalita's lifestyle (dating rich men in exchange for luxury material goods).

Within this episode Carrie is positioned to some extent as an 'irresponsible consumer'. In debates about consumption, the irresponsible consumer is often characterised as female.³⁰⁴ She is perceived as irrational, wasteful and easily manipulated. Moreover, she is presented as 'status-seeking, superficial' and spends beyond her means.³⁰⁵ The consumption of fashion in particular is viewed as especially wasteful and indulgent. Carrie portrays some of these traits in this episode. She allows herself to be 'manipulated' insofar as she buys a pair of shoes, which she does not need and cannot afford. However, the episode does not result in Carrie changing her attitude towards fashion and consumption. While by the end of the episode she has decided where to draw the line between professional girlfriend and professional, she keeps the \$1000 and the shoes. In other words, Carrie's 'irresponsible' consumer behaviour is questioned, but not wholly rejected.

The boundaries of acceptable consumption practices are continually challenged within SATC. In the episode 'Ring a Ding Ding' (season four, episode 16) Carrie needs to make a down payment on her apartment but is refused a loan. During a shopping scene, Miranda makes clear that the reason Carrie has no money is because she has spent over \$40,000 on designer shoes. The scene begins with the pair in a non-specified shoe shop. Carrie, again, the bearer of the look, gazes longingly at the shoes on display and says 'water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink'.

³⁰⁴ See Slater's *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, in his chapter 'The Freedoms of the Market', Slater interrogates gendered representations of the consumer.

³⁰⁵ Miller, 'Consumption as the Vanguard of History', p. 38

She then decides to ‘try on’ several pairs of shoes, but instructs the shop assistant not to allow her to buy them; she is trying them on for fun. This sets Carrie apart from the ‘typical’ irresponsible consumer as she does not buy shoes as a means to acquire ‘status’ or to ‘keep up with the Joneses’. Rather, it is implied that her desire to consume is motivated by her appreciation for beautiful objects. The show, therefore, refuses to condemn Carrie’s behaviour.

In the show’s official companion book, Kiss and Tell, SJP’s comments on this particular episode offer some insight into why the show remains ambivalent towards Carrie’s consumption practices. She claims, ‘Carrie has no gal Friday. She is her own gal Friday. She doesn’t have a lot of money, and she makes bad choices with her money, but she has never been anything other than completely independent.’³⁰⁶ For Parker, Carrie’s ‘bad choices’ are in some ways justified due to the fact that she ‘independent’. This speaks to a longstanding assumption regarding the way in which postfeminist culture validates and celebrates consumer behaviour. As Negra and Tasker note, postfeminism ‘elevates consumption as a strategy for healing those dissatisfactions that might alternatively be understood in terms of social ills and discontents.’³⁰⁷ Moreover, they demonstrate how recent postfeminist attitudes toward consumption seek to ‘commodify feminism via the figure of the woman as empowered consumer’.³⁰⁸ Carrie moves fluidly between the positions of ‘irresponsible’ consumer and ‘empowered consumer’ throughout the six seasons of SATC and thereby has a complicated (and as Jermyn notes ‘questioning’)³⁰⁹ outlook on postfeminism which, I argue, is continually foregrounded in the shopping sequences.

The notion of the postfeminist ‘empowered consumer’ is central to the narrative in ‘A Woman’s Right to Shoes’ (season six, episode nine). The title is of course a playful reworking of the feminist slogan – a woman’s right to choose, and the episode is concerned with a woman’s increased economic freedom following second wave feminism. The episode is framed by two very different shopping scenes which play key roles in communicating the show’s attitudes toward consumption and femininity. The episode opens with Carrie spending her Saturday morning searching for gifts for ‘previously single

³⁰⁶ Sarah Jessica Parker cited in Sohn, Kiss and Tell, p. 143

³⁰⁷ Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (2007) ‘Introduction’ in Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (eds) Interrogating Postfeminism, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 2

³⁰⁸ Tasker and Negra, ‘Introduction’, p. 2

³⁰⁹ Jermyn, Sex and the City, p. 3

New Yorkers'. This involves a montage of Carrie becoming increasingly frustrated and bored in a variety of department stores. The final shot is of Carrie purchasing a 'little me activity chair' for a friend's baby shower, an event which becomes the narrative focus of the episode.

During the baby shower, Carrie is forced to remove her Manolo Blahnik sandals which subsequently get stolen. The host of the shower, Kyra (Tatum O'Neal) eventually offers to pay for the shoes but upon hearing the cost (\$485), she refuses. The following exchange takes place:

Kyra: I just think it's crazy to spend that much on shoes.

Carrie: You know how much Manolos are, you used to wear Manolos.

Kyra: Sure, before I had a real life.

Here, Kyra perceives Carrie as a wasteful and indulgent consumer and in so doing trivialises her lifestyle, or as Carrie puts it, 'shoe shames' her. Her feelings towards Carrie and her consumer behaviour echo a more traditional understanding of consumer culture which views consumption as 'the "trivial" pastime of women.'³¹⁰ This episode explicitly challenges this assumption. Following her disagreement with Kyra, Carrie realises that she has spent over \$2300 on wedding gifts and baby showers for Kyra and because she has chosen to reject a life of traditional domesticity, has received nothing in return. In order to rectify this, Carrie informs Kyra that she is getting married 'to herself' and is registered at Manolo Blahnik. In the final shopping scene of the episode, Kyra and her two noisy children are in the Manolo Blahnik store. The children are running around the shop, clearly out of her control as Kyra purchases the shoes. As Kyra pays for the shoes, the shop assistant looks disparagingly at the children and asks Kyra to control them, as she doesn't want them touching the shoes. Kyra is therefore, subjected to the 'shame' that she inflicts on Carrie earlier in the episode. Kyra's embodiment of traditional femininity is 'out of place' in the store and Carrie's single lifestyle, and consumption practices, are ultimately privileged.

Masculinity and Consumer Practices

³¹⁰ Cara Louise Buckley and Brian L. Ott (2008) 'Fashion(able/ing) Selves' in Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott and Cara Louise Buckley (eds) *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 212

The understanding that fashion is ultimately a trivial and inherently feminine pastime is often perpetuated by the attitudes of some of the male characters within the show. In 'The Caste System' (season two, episode 10), Miranda invites Steve (David Eigenberg) to an event hosted by her firm. When Miranda asks Steve if he has any formal wear, he reveals that he owns a gold corduroy suit. Miranda then persuades Steve he needs a new suit. This exchange suggests immediately that Steve lacks the cultural competences in fashion and positions him within a specific class stratum. As the title of the episode suggests, the performance of classed identities is central to the narrative and is made clear within Miranda and Steve's shopping scene. The scene begins with a shop assistant handing Miranda a glass of water, indicating that the pair are visiting a 'high end' tailor. This is further evidenced by the fact that Steve is having a suit fitted, rather than purchasing one off the rack. In contrast to female oriented shopping scenes, Steve is arguably positioned as the object of the gaze (both the audience and Miranda's). He appears in the centre of the frame in a designer navy blue suit. When Miranda asks his opinion of the suit, he replies 'I think it's frightening how good I look', again, signalling that he is the desired object and also demonstrating that he is taking pleasure in the processes of adornment. His pleasure however, is short lived once he realises the price of the suit (\$1800). He is clearly shocked at the price tag, thereby suggesting that he thinks it is irrational to spend so much on a suit. This represents the activity of spending large sums of money on apparently 'frivolous' items as intrinsically feminine. Moreover, he demonstrates his lack of cultural competences as he does not recognise the worth of the outfit. Miranda, in contrast, is not surprised by the price and offers to pay for the suit. Their class difference is keenly highlighted in this scene which results in Steve refusing to let Miranda pay. He claims that if she bought him the suit, he would start to think of her as his mother. Thus, this exchange makes clear that Steve has an understanding of conventionally 'appropriate' gender roles with regard to consumption, i.e. it is only appropriate for a female to buy him clothes if she is his mother. For Steve, it is not appropriate for Miranda, as his girlfriend, to buy him the suit he cannot afford. The shopping scene proves so distressing for Steve that ultimately he ends his relationship with Miranda claiming that she needs to be with someone 'more on her level'. While Steve and Miranda are able to reconcile these differences in season six, a similar incident occurs between Carrie and her boyfriend Jack Berger which signals the end of their relationship.

The episode 'Lights, Camera, Relationship' (season six, episode five) opens with a shopping scene. In her opening voice-over Carrie explains that: 'In every relationship there comes a time when you have to take the next step... for some it's meeting the parents. For me, it's meeting the Prada'. Carrie's playful monologue thereby makes clear how important fashion is to her, and signals that it is Berger's first time in the Prada store. As the pair enter the white, stylish and spacious boutique, Berger acknowledges its aesthetic differences to other (non designer) outlets. He jokes, 'on my planet the clothing stores have clothes'. His witty remark not only indicates the class difference between the pair, but again, speaks to the notion that Carrie's world of high end fashion is 'ludicrous' and 'pretentious'. Shortly after they enter, the shop assistant tries to persuade Berger to buy a Prada shirt. Initially, he appreciates the quality of the tailoring, claiming – 'I never say fabulous, but if I did, I would. That's what a real shirt looks like.' However, as with Steve, Berger is outraged by the price and refuses to buy the shirt. In a later scene Carrie presents Berger with the shirt as a gift as she has received an advance from her publishers. The shirt then signals Carrie's financial and professional success, which Berger resents, and though he tries to overcome his feelings, their relationship ends in the following episode.

In rejecting high-end fashion, both Berger and Steve perform their perception of 'appropriate' versions of masculinity. While fashion is often considered 'trivial' - and the women who devote their time to it, 'dupes' - men who participate in fashion are perceived as worse. As Ott and Buckley write, '[t]he women who actively and openly admit their enthusiasm for fashion are commonly viewed as simple-minded Barbies who have regressed the project of feminism. But interest in fashion can also be damning for men, as it violates traditional notions of masculinity.'³¹¹ Therefore, both Steve and Berger escape this pejorative stigma and in so doing reinforce the notion that engagement in this particular kind of fashion and consumption practices is implicitly female.

However, the rejection of fashion by male characters means that they are presented as outsiders. They are not included in the world of the female leads. The main female characters therefore police these boundaries, allowing the participation in fashion practices to remain a private and gendered space to which only women have access. Indeed, recent feminist work on fashion has endeavoured to illustrate that this exclusivity can be viewed positively. As Church Gibson notes,

³¹¹ Buckley and Ott, 'Fashion(able/ing) Selves' p. 212

feminism can best resist patriarchy by insisting that women's involvement with fashion - women's identification with fashion, the identification of women with fashion - can actually be read positively, as identifying women with a world of contingent material surfaces, as opposed to the world of ideas and the spirit that has constituted the intellectual world of patriarchy.³¹²

The 'feminine' practice of fashion and consumption in SATC allows the lead characters (and female audience) a space in which they can take pleasure in discussing and debating feminine concerns and issues without the 'intrusion' of patriarchy. This is apparent in the way in which the shopping scenes in particular function as a space where narrative concerns are foregrounded and worked through. Moreover, the narratives are largely concerned with the relationship between fashion and identity, and seek to explore the ways in which identity can be made and remade in contemporary culture. In so doing, the show performs an ideological critique of postmodern models of identity, insofar as it suggests that although fashion can serve to obscure cultural identities they are ultimately constrained by gender and class. Moreover, it also indicates that in order to complicate/obscure cultural identities, one must be in possession of the correct consumer competences. In other words, Carrie is able to make and remake her identity through image management because she has the cultural competences necessary. In so doing, she is able to recognise the boundaries of the gendered/classed/racial identity and deviate from them, but these boundaries must exist in order for Carrie to create her own identity in opposition to them.

These interrelated concerns of SATC, I wish to suggest, contribute to the show's agenda of both challenging and privileging the practice and consumption of fashion. In so doing, the show seeks to offset concerns that fashion, and indeed femininity is 'trivial'. Several of these threads will continue to be explored in the chapters which follow. In particular, the concept of masculinity within regard to fashion and consumption practices is the main focus of the next chapter.

³¹² Church Gibson, 'Redressing the Balance', p. 355-356

Chapter Five

Antifashion Programming: Fashion, Character and Identity in The O.C.

'Fashion was as much a part of *The OC* as a Ryan fistfight or a Marissa meltdown.'³¹³

In 2003, the popular press identified Fox's The O.C. as the show which would supersede SATC as 'one of the greatest trendsetters' in television.³¹⁴ Indeed, as with SATC, fashion has an important stylistic function within The O.C. insofar as the show's preoccupation with luxury and high fashion contributes to the construction of a 'quality' aesthetic. However, unlike SATC and Ugly Betty, fashion is not integral to The O.C.'s narrative and subject matter. This chapter thus examines precisely how fashion is used within The O.C. and in so doing, it once again considers the conceptual relationship between fashion and costume. While fashion is somewhat sidelined within the narrative, I demonstrate that The O.C.'s use of fashion marks a departure from more traditional uses of costume which seek to 'serve' the narrative and characterisation. As such, I continue to examine debates raised in the previous chapter, in terms of the relationship between clothing and identity, and the way in which these shows can be understood as seeking to address an audience of potential consumers who have the ability to 'read' fashion.

This chapter differs however, insofar as it focuses primarily on the show's representation of male fashion practices, and the relationship between fashion and masculine identities. The cultural knowledge and competences necessary to 'read' fashion have long since been considered an implicitly feminine skill. According to Jennifer Craik, the common assumption regarding men's participation in fashion is that it does not exist. She writes 'men [are perceived as having] not been duped into the endless pursuit of seasonal fads'.³¹⁵ However, the male characters' fashion within The O.C. is often the focus of extra textual discussion. In addition, The O.C. is recognised as impacting on male fashions. That said, the male fashion practices depicted within The O.C. are in some ways connected to those 'antifashion'³¹⁶ (and typically 'masculine') processes associated with subculture and style.

³¹³ Alison Maxwell 'What sucked us into 'The OC' orbit?', USA Today, http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2007-02-20-the-OC-finale_x.htm, (accessed 13/02/2009)

³¹⁴ Karen Thomas (27/2/2004) 'Is there Fashion After Sex?', USA Today, http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2004-02-26-tv-fashion_x.htm, (accessed 13/02/2009)

³¹⁵ Jennifer Craik (1994) The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion, London and New York: Routledge, p. 176

³¹⁶ The term antifashion is used to describe resistance from 'mainstream' fashion. This is not to suggest that the show takes an 'antifashion' perspective, but rather the male fashion practices exhibited demonstrate an 'active' engagement with 'subcultural' styles.

For, as Dick Hebdige notes, masculine subcultures have long since used style as a form of resistance.³¹⁷ As such, I seek to examine the ways in which male fashions are exhibited within the show, and as part of the narrative. As this chapter shall demonstrate, despite the show's investment in 'antifashion' practices, it invokes many of the key narrative tropes associated primarily with the 'woman's film' such as the makeover/Cinderella narrative.

This has broader implications regarding fashion and its treatment as an ultimately 'trivial', 'inconsequential' and inherently 'feminine' pastime. While the privileging of male fashions may seek to challenge the stigma attached to men with an interest in fashion, the show also seeks to distance fashion from its association with 'feminine' culture. This chapter therefore, examines the ways in which The O.C. seeks to legitimise fashion, and explores precisely what is at stake, from a feminist perspective, in its representation of masculinity and fashion.

Fashion, Costume and Character

In the pilot episode, the main character Ryan (Benjamin McKenzie), leaves his home town of Chino (and previous life of crime) to stay with the Cohen family in Newport Beach. After stealing a car, getting caught by the police, and being thrown out of his home, Ryan is invited to temporarily stay at the house of his defence lawyer, Sandy Cohen (Peter Gallagher). During his stay Ryan's 'real' identity is concealed and instead he is introduced to the Cohen's neighbours as 'Sandy's nephew from Boston'.

In this episode, fashion functions primarily as costume insofar as it contributes the characterisation of the show's principal characters, particularly Ryan, whose struggles to 'fit in' with his affluent peers are played out through dress. In this pilot, Ryan attempts to consolidate his working class identity with his temporarily elevated status. As such, his costuming is circumscribed by his economic and class position. However, as Joanne Entwistle has argued, there are problems with the notion that fashion can be used to simply 'interpret' a person's identity. She writes:

On the one hand the clothes we choose to wear can be expressive of identity, telling others something about our gender, class status and so on; on the other, our clothes

³¹⁷ Dick Hebdige (1979) Subculture: The Meaning of Style, London: Methuen

cannot always be ‘read’, since they do not straightforwardly ‘speak’ and can therefore be open to misinterpretation.³¹⁸

Costume, on the other hand, is specifically designed to prevent this misunderstanding of characters, although, as Sarah Street notes ‘costume is a *key* element for suggesting the mutability of identity but also of exploring an individual’s pursuit to fix identity through appearance’³¹⁹[my emphasis]. This function of costume is imperative in the pilot which uses specific garments (that are widely recognised as representative of specific class identities) in order to communicate Ryan’s ‘story’ as he oscillates between class positions.

In the opening scenes of the pilot, Ryan steals a car with his elder brother, Trey (Bradley Stryker). Ryan is dressed in a white T shirt, grey hooded sweater and leather jacket. This particular ensemble, I would argue, cues the audience to make an assumption about Ryan’s character as each garment has clear connotations within western culture. The leather jacket, for example, is often associated with a variety of subcultures, and constructs a ‘tough’ and intimidating image.³²⁰ Similarly, the hooded sweatshirt (‘hoodie’) is increasingly associated with criminal and antisocial youth behaviour. Moreover, the white T shirt is particularly revealing of Ryan’s character, and has traditionally been associated with cinematic depictions of a specific version of working class heterosexual masculinity. As such, Ryan is characterised, not only as a social outcast, but also embodies a decidedly working-class masculinity.

According to Bruzzi, from the 1990s onwards, the white T shirt symbolised ‘the male star’s eroticism and his availability as an object of sexual desire.’³²¹ Similarly, the white vest is traditionally associated with muscular action film heroes of the 1980s such as Bruce Willis and Sly Stallone and draws attention to a corporeal masculinity. Ryan’s developed physicality is showcased in the white shirt in this scene, and in his white vest, which becomes his sartorial trademark in the scenes that follow. As with the garments described above, the white vest also communicates the class difference between Ryan and other characters. In using the white vest, or ‘wife-beater’ as it is (problematically) described in the show, The O.C. not only seeks to position Ryan within a specific socio-economic

³¹⁸ Entwistle, The Fashioned Body, p. 112

³¹⁹ Street, Costume and Cinema, p. 35

³²⁰ Indeed, it has a cinematic heritage dating from the 1950s. Famous examples include, Marlon Brando (On the Waterfront (1954)) and James Dean (Rebel Without a Cause (1955))

³²¹ Stella Bruzzi (2005) ‘Gregory Peck: Anti-Fashion Icon’ in Rachel Moseley (ed) Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture and Identity, London: BFI publishing, p. 48

category, but also associates him with a specific version of masculinity. As the misogynistic term ‘wife-beater’ suggests, the white vest carries negative connotations regarding criminal activity and is associated with decidedly working class masculinity. These negative connotations are widely recognised in British and American culture, and beyond.³²²

While Ryan is arguably designed to be read in these terms in the opening scenes of the pilot, the remainder of the episode depicts his transformation which is played out in a (typically feminine) makeover scene. During his stay with the Cohen’s, Ryan is forced to attend a charity fashion show event (under the assumed guise of the cousin from Boston). In the scenes leading up to the event, an over the shoulder shot in a mirror slowly pans upwards to reveal that Ryan is not wearing a white ‘wife-beater’, but actually a white cotton shirt. The shot resembles a ‘reveal’ in a makeover programme, however rather than surprise and joy, Ryan’s facial expression reveals that he is uncomfortable in his new attire. He then unsuccessfully attempts to put on a tie (and discards it), unbuttons his top button and puts on a suit jacket. Shortly afterwards, Sandy enters the room and the following exchange takes place:

Sandy: ‘Wow! Look at that. It fits you beautifully – where’s your tie?’

Ryan: ‘I’m not going to wear one. Open collar – it’s a good look.’

Sandy: ‘I didn’t know how to tie a tie till I was twenty five’

Sandy then teaches Ryan how to ‘tie his tie’. The camera pulls back to reveal Ryan’s reflection in the full length mirror in his suit. This scene is central to the characterisation of Ryan. Not only does the costuming reflect the class difference between Ryan and his peers, but also his lack of cultural competences in fashion practices remind viewers of the divide. Moreover, it could be argued that the scene positions Ryan as a point of entry for audiences who lack the competences required for ‘reading’ fashion. They are invited to learn, as Ryan does, the competences in fashion practices and decode their meaning.

When Ryan appears in the suit, (clearly an expensive, quality item), he embodies an alternative version of masculinity to that signified by the white vest. As Church Gibson argues in her article ‘Brad Pitt and George Clooney, the Rough and the Smooth: Male Costuming in Contemporary Hollywood’, two types of leading men dominate the screen:

³²² In Colombia, for example, the vest is known as a ‘buscapleitos’, meaning ‘trouble seeker’.

the ‘rough and ready’ Brad Pitt type and the ‘smooth’ George Clooney type (to use her own examples).³²³ The Brad Pitt character demonstrates his masculinity and overt sexuality through the availability of the body, while George Clooney is characterised by his concealed, but still apparent, physicality. Within cultural studies of fashion, the suit is understood as a garment which represents an ‘ideal’ masculinity. As Bruzzi notes, ‘[m]asculine attire, traditionally characterised by consistency, functionality and durability, is exemplified by the suit.’³²⁴ It conceals and ‘renders the male body inaccessible’.³²⁵ The costuming in this scene therefore represents Ryan as the archetypal ‘suited hero’,³²⁶ a recurrent figure in contemporary popular cinema, whose sexuality and physical attractiveness is enhanced by the structure of the suit which broadens the shoulders and the chest. Moreover, while performing this particular notion of masculinity, Ryan’s suit also works as masquerade concealing his ‘authentic’ class identity. As such, the pilot episode invokes a ‘Cinderella’ narrative, which are, as Moseley notes, ‘always bound up with dress’,³²⁷ and ‘are profoundly tied to the acquisition of subjectivity and a classed subjectivity at that.’³²⁸

The pilot episode of The O.C. adopts a Cinderella narrative insofar as Ryan is granted *temporary* access to a higher social status, which is articulated through dress. As with the Cinderella narrative, ‘a question lingers over whether “class” can ever really be acquired, or whether it can only be performed, more or less successfully.’³²⁹ In response to this question, the narrative traditionally exposes the ‘real’ identity of the Cinderella thereby stripping her of her acquired status before ultimately allowing her to transcend her initially lower class position. This narrative structure is employed within The O.C. and by the end of the pilot Ryan’s ‘real’ identity as a working class, petty criminal is exposed and by episode three Ryan is invited to live with the Cohen’s permanently. As with other interpretations of the Cinderella narrative, the pilot episode presents Ryan as deserving of this higher social status in order to offset anxieties which may arise from his adopting an identity to which he is not (socially) entitled. During his first meeting with Sandy it

³²³ Pamela Church Gibson (2005) ‘Brad Pitt and George Clooney, the Rough and the Smooth: Male Costuming in Contemporary Hollywood’ in Rachel Moseley (ed) Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture and Identity, London: BFI publishing, pp. 62-74

³²⁴ Bruzzi, Undressing Cinema, p. 69

³²⁵ Church Gibson, ‘Brad Pitt and George Clooney, the Rough and the Smooth’, p. 68

³²⁶ Church Gibson, ‘Brad Pitt and George Clooney, the Rough and the Smooth’, p. 68

³²⁷ Moseley, ‘Dress, Class and Audrey Hepburn’, p. 116

³²⁸ Moseley, ‘Dress, Class and Audrey Hepburn’, p. 118

³²⁹ Moseley, ‘Dress, Class and Audrey Hepburn’, p. 117

becomes apparent that Ryan is of above average intelligence. Other moments like these also signal Ryan's humility, thoughtfulness and bravery which suggest that he is deserving of a better life. The costuming in the scene discussed above also reflects this, and demonstrates that Ryan's formal wear (despite his initial reservations) fits his character. For example, in the makeover scene discussed above, Sandy also remarks that the formal suit 'beats a jump suit' (referring to the prisoner's uniform Ryan wears when they first meet), in so doing, he suggests that fashion has helped Ryan express his 'inner' personality.

The Cinderella narrative has long since been a narrative trope of the woman's film and other genres which are coded as feminine (i.e. reality television). As Moseley notes, this particular narrative appeals to 'a feminine audience, one which is competent in reading sartorial codes.'³³⁰ According to Sarah Berry, the audience pleasure derived from the Cinderella narrative is due to the fact that it 'encourages fantasies of self-transformation'.³³¹ Moreover, the notion that an individual can transcend their social class through image management and performance has historically been exclusively associated with the 'feminine'. The use of the Cinderella narrative with regard to Ryan and his transformation, challenges those longstanding assumptions which equate femininity with 'artifice' and 'performance', and masculinity with 'authenticity'.

As the scene above demonstrates, when Ryan wears the suit, he is able to blur class boundaries and this can be read as empowering. However, it is important to note that while Ryan's use of fashion to disguise his social class is celebrated, there are other examples within the show when fashion is presented as negatively associated with artifice and a lack of authenticity. At the fashion show, Ryan is able to fool other guests into believing that he is someone else. This pretence is only acceptable because the narrative has signalled that Ryan *belongs* with the Cohen family. For example, to return to the scene mentioned above when Ryan looks at his reflection in the mirror, his expression indicates that he is proud of his transformation. In addition, I would argue that the camerawork suggests that the audience should also empathise with Ryan. The over the shoulder shots of Ryan in the mirror not only fetishize his body in the suit, but also, I would suggest that we as the

³³⁰ Moseley, 'Dress, Class and Audrey Hepburn', p. 113

³³¹ Berry, Screen Style, p. 185

audience are positioned to imagine that we are seeing our own reflection. Thus, his pride and acceptance serves as an indication as to how *we* could respond to the same image.

This is not to suggest that Ryan entirely rejects his working-class identity, but rather that he oscillates between the two versions.³³² As such, Ryan's class position is never fixed insofar as often he faces challenges which result in him temporarily rejecting his newly found affluent status. For example, in the finale of season one, Ryan's ex-girlfriend (Theresa played by Navi Rawat) announces that she is pregnant with his child. Therefore, he decides to return to Chino with Theresa. In the final scenes, Ryan appears dressed in his leather jacket, white T-shirt and hooded sweatshirt (the outfit he wears in the pilot episode).

For the most part however, Ryan consolidates his two 'classed' identities. In the special feature documentary available with the season two box set, the cast are interviewed about their wardrobe. When asked about his costuming Benjamin MacKenzie interestingly claims, 'Ryan Atwood putting on a "wife-beater" is like Superman putting on a cape'.³³³ In drawing a parallel between Ryan's 'wife-beater' and Superman's cape, MacKenzie articulates the importance of dress in expressing a 'core' identity. Indeed, the story of Superman is preoccupied with discourses of costume, identity and disguise (Clark Kent is Superman's disguise and the Superman uniform reveals his 'core'/'authentic' identity). Moreover, it is also suggested in some of the comic books that the Superman suit is representative of his place of origin; it bears his family crest and is created from the lining of the ship which brought him to Earth. Therefore, Mackenzie highlights the 'transformative power' of the 'wife-beater' and how crucial the garment is in expressing his 'roots' which inform his 'authentic' identity. Moreover, the documentary reveals that both the white vest and Ryan's black boots are used in every episode. Both of these garments allow Ryan to remember his 'real', 'authentic' working-class identity. As MacKenzie observes of Ryan, 'he's got to hold onto something'.³³⁴ By combining his old wardrobe with new garments Ryan is able to express his 'authentic' self. While, as previously discussed, the concept of a *fixed* and *unchanging* identity is challenged in aspects of (modern and) postmodern thought, Ryan's masculinity suggests that a more

³³² Indeed, this may in part be due to the fact that the use of the Cinderella motif within serial programming means that no conclusion/fixed identity can be reached until the end of the series. As such, Ryan continues to grapple with his identity until the end of season four.

³³³ Benjamin McKenzie (2004) 'Beachy Couture' documentary *The O.C.* season two box set

³³⁴ Benjamin McKenzie (2004) 'Beachy Couture' Documentary *The O.C.* season two box set

fixed identity is possible. Indeed, consolidating two identities to reveal a true or ‘authentic’ self is a key narrative trope in the classical woman’s film, the most often cited being Charlotte Vale’s (Bette Davis) transformation in Now, Voyager.

Ryan’s ambivalence towards fashion is contrasted with the character of Seth (Adam Brody), who ‘actively’ participates in fashion practices and cultivates an identity through fashion. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, male participation in fashion practices has traditionally been stigmatised and while Ryan, at times, demonstrates disinterestedness when it comes to dress, Seth (Adam Brody) uses fashion to express his difference. That said, Seth’s engagement in fashion practices emerges from an ‘anti-fashion’ and ‘subcultural’ perspective which is characterised as ‘active’ male behaviour. He dresses to mark his difference from the ‘fashion victims’ which he believes populate Newport Beach.

Youth, Subcultures and Emo Fashion

Writing on youth subcultures, Joanne Hollows describes how previous scholarship has tended to view youth subcultures positively. She claims:

youth subcultures are valued positively because, it is supposed, they are *actively produced* by young people themselves; they are defined by their distance from *commerce*; they are therefore more ‘*authentic*’; they are a means by which young people express their difference; and they are *deviant, resistant* and *oppositional*³³⁵ [emphasis in original].

All these characteristics, she notes, are perceived to be inherently gendered, i.e. identified as masculine traits. In opposition, the popular, she argues, is coded as feminine, insofar as it is viewed as ‘passive’, ‘inauthentic’ and ‘conformist’.³³⁶

Seth, like Ryan, is an outsider in his community. While Seth has access to the same level of economic capital as his peers, he also has an abundance of what Sarah Thornton has termed ‘subcultural capital’. For Thornton, drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, ‘subcultural capital’ can be ‘objectified or embodied’.³³⁷ She writes, ‘subcultural capital can be objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and carefully assembled record collections...[in addition] subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being in the

³³⁵ Hollows, Femininity, Feminism and Popular Culture, p. 162

³³⁶ Hollows, Femininity, Feminism and Popular Culture, p. 162

³³⁷ Sarah Thornton (1997) ‘The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital’ in Ken Gelder (ed) The Subcultures Reader, London and New York: Routledge p. 186

know’.³³⁸ Moreover, this should all appear to be ‘second nature’.³³⁹ It is unsurprising that Thornton’s examples of how subcultural capital is objectified are related to fashion and music given that the two cultural industries have shared a successful symbiotic relationship. In *The O.C.*, Seth demonstrates his subcultural capital primarily through dress, which reflects his ‘knowledge’ and ‘good taste’ of ‘alternative’ music. He wears, for example, a number of band T shirts which demonstrate his knowledge of music and musical ‘taste’.

Fashion and music have long since enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. According to Noel McLaughlin, ‘the pop music and fashion industries are regarded as sharing a close relationship: popular music is taken to play a powerful role in ‘shop-windowing’ and selling clothes... and in turn, clothing has been viewed as a central part of how popular music signifies’.³⁴⁰ This is not to suggest, however, that fashion is exclusively bound up with the ‘popular’ or ‘mainstream’³⁴¹ although there is, as McLaughlin notes, a longstanding assumption that alternative music is associated with ‘antifashion’ ideologies; as both pop and fashion ‘are essentially a “feminine” preserve and “not worth bothering with”’.³⁴² Drawing on Grossberg’s work on rock music and authenticity, he argues that alternative music’s ‘difference from pop and the world of fashion enabled [it] “to matter.”’ That said, this resistance to mainstream fashion was nevertheless enacted *through* clothing and the appropriation of style. Indeed, fashion and ‘alternative’ music are equally as interrelated and this has been the subject of academic inquiry – notably Dick Hebdige’s work on the body, clothes and punk music.

Hebdige explores how, in particular, masculine subcultures use style as a form of resistance. The punk aesthetic was designed to ‘shock’ and ‘make strange’, and as such, connections were made between the punk movement and modern art which tried ‘to look at the everyday world in a new way, and force others to do so’.³⁴³ The punk aesthetic then, appropriated ‘everyday’ household objects, incorporating them into dress:

³³⁸ Thornton, ‘The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital’, p. 186

³³⁹ Thornton, ‘The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital’, p. 185

³⁴⁰ Noel McLaughlin (2000) ‘Rock, Fashion and Performativity’ in Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 264

³⁴¹ It is important to note that the term mainstream does not refer to a single or unified concept but rather, a fluid, changing and most importantly ‘feminine’ ‘other’ of a specific ‘subculture’.

³⁴² McLaughlin, ‘Rock, Fashion and Performativity’, p. 266

³⁴³ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, p. 195

Objects borrowed from the most sordid of contexts found a place in the punks' ensembles: lavatory chains were draped in graceful arcs across chests encased in plastic bin-liners.. 'Cheap' trashy fabrics (PVC, plastic, lurex etc) in vulgar designs (mock leopard skin) and 'nasty' colours...were salvaged by the punks and turned into garments...which offered self-conscious commentaries on the notion of modernity and taste.³⁴⁴

This approach to fashion and style was celebrated within the academy and contributed to the legitimisation of fashion as an area of study. Yet it should be noted, as Hollow's quote above suggests, that this legitimisation of fashion arises out of its connection to 'masculine' values. Seth's engagement with fashion can be understood as informed by this more 'masculine' approach given that it is his associations with 'alternative' music which dictate his dress.

Seth's interest in emo music, which is often commented upon in the narrative, is viewed as a descendent of the punk genre insofar as it is primarily associated with youth and is motivated by a political anti-establishment philosophy. The emo genre of music is relatively new, originally evolving from hardcore punk. In the early 2000s it became part of mainstream popular culture and is now associated primarily with angst-ridden teenagers. In contrast to the punk movement, the emo style is less concerned with an 'anti-fashion' agenda; rather than appropriating everyday items, the emo style is more concerned with 'appropriating' existing fashions, including those traditionally associated with punk. For example, the Converse All Star shoe, initially designed to capture the basketball shoe market was appropriated by the punk movement and has subsequently become part of the emo style. Similarly, tartan fabric – also appropriated by punk has since been adopted by emo. Other garments associated with the look are striped polo shirts, dark hooded sweatshirts, Vans skate shoes, jeans and slogan T shirts - all of which are incorporated into Seth's wardrobe and work to communicate meaning and inform his 'cultural identity'. Moreover, the emo genre is associated with a set of specific character traits, i.e. shyness, introversion, sensitivity and emotionality. This is perhaps why the style lends itself well to costume as it is already considered to be a 'signifying language' within western culture. These very specific characteristics, with which the 'emo' style is associated within a wider context, are performed by Seth in the show.

³⁴⁴ Hebdige, *Subculture*, p. 107

In episode one, season five (aptly titled ‘The Outsider’), Seth wears a Paul Frank T-shirt with the image of three guitar tabs of chords A,D,G (the most commonly used chords) and the slogan ‘now start a band’. The T-shirt became one of the most sought after garments on the show; according to a 2003 edition of The Hollywood Reporter ‘the adorable geek...has kids burning up message boards on the network’s web site. Smitten fans want to have him. They also want his shirt.’³⁴⁵ Indeed, it is Seth’s fashion which has arguably had the biggest impact on the fashion industry, as he is thought to be responsible for the emergence of ‘geek chic’. Therefore, as with SATC, the fashion in The O.C. has enjoyed a cultural resonance which extends beyond the level of text. In addition however, this T-shirt is central in reflecting Seth’s character; it demonstrates his ‘subcultural capital’ insofar as it suggests he has a set of cultural competences related to music. It also represents Seth’s opposition to populist mainstream bands as it sarcastically remarks upon the lack of skill needed to make popular music. Moreover, it also reflects Seth’s own investment in emo music.

Seth’s wardrobe also demonstrates an ability to mix various styles. In the documentary special feature, the show’s costume designer, Karla Stevens, remarks upon how she puts together a simple polo T-shirt with a pair of what she terms ‘man trousers’ (which are smart, men’s fitted trousers usually associated with the ‘serious’, and masculine, world of ‘business’) and a pair of Vans or Chuck Taylor’s. Mixing styles, it is often claimed, is a way in which an individual can exercise resistance to the mainstream. Similarly, the ‘re-appropriation’ of certain garments can also demonstrate resistance as they each involve the ‘breaking’ of existing codes of fashion. Hebdige claims that ‘artistic expression and aesthetic pleasure are intimately bound up with the destruction of existing codes and the formulation of new ones.’³⁴⁶ Furthermore, drawing on Hebdige, Elizabeth Wilson describes how ‘punk was the opposite of mainstream fashion which always attempts to naturalise the strange rather than the other way about’.³⁴⁷ She claims that the punk aesthetic ‘radically questions its own terms of reference, questions what fashion *is*, what style *is*, making mincemeat of received notions of beauty and trashing the very idea of ‘charm’ and ‘taste’ [emphasis in original].³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Lacher ‘Frock Stars’, p. S-1

³⁴⁶ Hebdige, Subculture, p. 129

³⁴⁷ Wilson, Adorned in Dreams, p. 196

³⁴⁸ Wilson, Adorned in Dreams, p. 196

The 're-appropriation' of the 'man trousers', usually associated with seriousness, work and 'power', are used in Seth's wardrobe, I would argue, for a different effect. Arguably, his desire is to 'make strange' the conservative pair of trousers, and in so doing, demonstrates his resistance to the kind of meaning they stand for. Similarly, the polo shirt, which has been appropriated within emo subculture, is also associated with a mainstream 'preppy' style – which Seth seeks to distance himself from. This again highlights the way in which Seth seeks, at least in part, to 'disrupt' the traditional codes of fashion. Furthermore, it indicates not only that Seth is equipped with the 'subcultural capital' and cultural competences to do so, but it also could be argued, that the show addresses an audience with the skills in reading costume and fashion so that they can interpret this meaning.

Wilson claims that subcultures have a tendency to incorporate and 'caricature' more traditional forms of dress into their styles. However, an individual may be unable to recognise that the garment is being appropriated. With regard to *The O.C.*, there is the possibility that some audience members might read Seth's character differently. He could be mistaken for one of the 'preppy' 'Newpsies' that he wishes to distance himself from. I should note here, that the 'Newpsies' display attributes associated with the 'irresponsible' consumers (outlined in the previous chapter). Moreover, they are coded as 'middle-brow', insofar as they are presented as abundant in economic capital, but lacking in cultural knowledge and competences and thus 'legitimate' taste.

Seth's wardrobe, more so than Ryan's, I would argue, requires a deeper sophistication in cultural competences as he often wears garments 'ironically'. In the series, for example, he wears a long sleeved grey T-shirt with the slogan 'Let's Get Physical' in red and yellow. The slogan references the 1981 pop song, 'Physical' by Olivia Newton John. The garment is worn in this context presumably for its garish aesthetic and not because Seth is a fan of the song or artist. Moreover, the T-shirt functions as a form of visual gag.

Seth's ability to create an image which he considers to be 'oppositional' to the mainstream suggests that there is 'a monolithic mainstream to oppose'.³⁴⁹ This assumption has been critiqued in recent studies of fashion and subculture, which suggest that there are a variety of ways in which individuals can use dress as a form of resistance by 'playing' with and negotiating identity formation. Moreover, as Hollows illustrates, previous work on

³⁴⁹ Hollows, *Femininity, Feminism and Popular Culture*, p. 148

subcultures has ‘tend[ed] to neglect the ways in which women have used ‘everyday; fashion to negotiate identities and assert difference’.³⁵⁰ In fact, McRobbie has noted that girls and their relationship with subcultures have been neglected within academia. This has raised several questions regarding the relationship between girls and subcultures which McRobbie and Garber address in their work. For McRobbie and Garber:

Female participation in youth cultures can best be understood by moving away from the ‘classic’ subcultural terrain marked out as oppositional and creative by numerous sociologists. Girls negotiate a different leisure space and different personal spaces from those inhabited by boys. These in turn offer them different possibilities for ‘resistance’.³⁵¹

Fashion, Femininity and Resistance

The costuming of the female characters’ in The O.C. demonstrates how the lead girls use fashion to negotiate an oppositional feminine identity, although in some cases this involves participation in ‘everyday’ fashion to create difference. One recurring female character participates in an ‘anti-fashion’ subcultural resistance akin to Seth. Anna Stern (Samaire Armstrong), a love interest for Seth in season one, is described as the ‘female Seth’. In ‘The Debut’ (season one, episode four) Anna is introduced to Seth at the Cotillion during which she reveals her interest in comic books, sailing and emo music. Her similarities to Seth become the narrative focus of ‘The Rivals’ (season one, episode 17) when the pair arrive at school to find that they are dressed in almost identical attire, it becomes apparent that as a couple, they are too similar, and as such cannot sustain a romantic relationship. Anna is dressed for the most part in bright colours. While her approach to fashion is similar to Seth insofar as she mixes vintage and kitsch garments, it should be noted that her participation in subculture is to some degree ‘feminised’. For the most part, Anna displays a female punk aesthetic. The female punk aesthetic, it has been claimed, does in some ways ‘disrup[t] “naturalised” meanings’ but also ‘frequently reproduce[s] the meaning of gender differences’.³⁵² As such, her ‘resistive’ fashion practices are to some degree contained by gender.

Of the principle cast, it is the character of Marissa (Mischa Barton) that has the most complex and ambivalent relationship with fashion. Her fashion choices represent how she

³⁵⁰ Hollows, Femininity, Feminism and Popular Culture, p. 148

³⁵¹ Angela McRobbie & Jenny Garber [1977] (1997) ‘Girls and Subcultures’ in Ken Gelder (ed) The Subcultures Reader, London and New York: Routledge, p. 112

³⁵² Hollows, Femininity, Feminism and Popular Culture, p. 164

is forced to oscillate between two conflicting identities. In the pilot episode, Marissa's difficult relationship with her mother, Julie, is quickly established in a conversation the pair have about which dress Marissa should wear to the charity fashion show (which she has organised). As Marissa descends down her staircase in a black and white cocktail dress, her mother examines the outfit and concludes that Marissa should have worn her hair down instead of pulled back because it 'is too harsh on her angles'. Shortly afterwards, when discussing which dress Marissa will be modelling in the fashion show, her mother asks 'Are you going to wear the Donna Karen, Mariss? I thought it was very forgiving' (presumably in reference to her figure). This short scene establishes that Marissa's mother not only has a huge influence over what Marissa wears, but also attempts to force her into performing what Julie considers to be an 'appropriate' femininity. However, the fact that Marissa chooses to wear her hair up, and not down as her mother suggests, is indicative of the way in which Marissa uses fashion and beauty practices as a form of resistance. While at times Marissa does succumb to Julie's advice, often wearing particular outfits which she has chosen (mostly for formal events and functions), she also incorporates garments into her 'everyday' wardrobe which can be considered as 'oppositional'. For example, before the fashion show scene in the pilot episode Marissa is wearing a pair of Vans trainers, which as previously mentioned are associated with the emo fashion aesthetic. Moreover, 'The Model Home' (season one, episode two), it becomes apparent that Marissa embodies 'subcultural capital' insofar as, in a discussion about music with Seth and Ryan, Marissa reveals that she is into punk 'at the moment'. To which Seth replies 'Avril Lavigne doesn't count as punk'. Marissa retorts, 'what about The Cramps, Stiff Little Fingers, The Clash, Sex Pistols?' Seth is then appalled that he enjoys the same music as Marissa and concludes that he must kill himself. Ryan offers a less dramatic response than Seth, but still expresses his surprise that Marissa would listen to punk. Marissa simply shrugs and replies 'What? I'm angry.'

This exchange reveals two interrelated points about the relationship between fashion and music, and also the relationship between subculture and femininity. The two boys' surprise at Marissa's taste in music demonstrates that, whereas Seth's interest in 'emo' music is apparent from his apparel, Marissa chooses to conceal this facet of her personality, suggesting that she is more adept at fashion practices, and does not allow certain interests to dictate her wardrobe. In addition, it also suggests that Ryan and Seth are less skilled in

terms of ‘reading’ fashion as they are unable to notice the subtleties of Marissa’s wardrobe which ‘give away’ her interest in punk. Significantly, Marissa also claims that she is into punk ‘at the moment’, indicating that her identity is somehow more fluid than Seth’s and is likely to change at some point in the future, thereby reinforcing the ideology that femininity is more ‘capricious’ – more subject to fashion changes and fluctuating styles – and hence more easily ‘manipulated’ by consumer culture. This implies that Marissa’s ‘subcultural capital’ is temporary; thereby reinforcing the notion that female identity is fluid, and able to be continually made and remade through fashion.

The quote cited in the opening of this chapter is taken from a USA Today article which sought to pin down precisely why - even after its cancellation - The O.C. remains ‘so oddly compelling’.³⁵³ The article concludes that the fashion was crucial to securing its position as a culturally significant show in television. Thus, as this chapter demonstrates, the fashion within the show was not only essential to the development of its lead characters, but it also can be understood as ‘an additional source of meaning and pleasure’³⁵⁴ for audiences. As with SATC, The O.C. displays the complex relationship between fashion and identity. Moreover, in its representation of male fashion practices, The O.C. demonstrates how the use of fashion to create and maintain identity is not restricted to the female characters. In the introduction to this chapter, I suggested that the focus on masculinity and fashion may prove troubling from a feminist perspective insofar as it may seek to legitimise fashion by removing its connection with the feminine. However, as I illustrate, this is much more complex than it first appears. Perhaps Ryan maintains the most typically masculine attitude towards fashion insofar as he exhibits ‘disinterestedness’ in fashion throughout the series (despite participating in fashion in the makeover scene detailed above). Indeed, Seth engages, to some extent, in ‘antifashion’ practices, which have previously been understood as a rejection of the ‘feminine’ world of fashion. However, these ‘antifashion’ processes require a set of feminine competences which Seth displays in his appropriation of styles. Similarly, these skills are displayed in the female characters. While Anna demonstrates an affiliation with subculture and ‘antifashion’ practices she maintains a feminine identity. Moreover, Marissa, arguably coded as more ‘mainstream’ in dress, displays resistance in her ‘everyday’ dress. Thus it breaks down these perceived separate categories. As with SATC, The O.C. works from the assumption that there is a ‘real’/‘authentic’ identity that is

³⁵³ Maxwell, ‘What sucked us into ‘The OC’ orbit?’

³⁵⁴ Hollows, Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture, p. 154

shaped by 'habitus'. This, as the next chapter shall demonstrate, is where Ugly Betty differs in its representation of fashion and identity.

Chapter Six

Expressive/Excessive: Fashion, Comedy and Excess in Ugly Betty

‘I think I finally get it. Fashion is art. It’s just another way of taking what’s on the inside and putting it out there for everyone else to experience it. It’s not shallow. It’s courageous. It’s beautiful.’³⁵⁵

‘The key to sounding like you have good taste is hating everything. Just call it garish or ghoulish.’³⁵⁶

When prime-time comedy series Ugly Betty first aired in 2006, it received mixed reviews. While People affectionately described the show as a ‘delicious over-the-top comedy’,³⁵⁷ concerns regarding its ‘over-the-top’ nature were highlighted within the more ‘serious’ press. Virginia Heffernan, writing for The New York Times for example, claimed:

For a serious-minded girl not to understand couture or street-trash ensembles like the designs of Jeffrey Sebelia on “Project Runway” might be admirable. But for a literate, sentient, self-aware young woman to prefer bulky belted layers in clashing patterns and cacophonous shades of red and orange to (at least) the affordable A-line skirts and cotton button-downs at Old Navy or Target, that makes no sense...Betty’s clothes, in other words, the most flamboyant side of her, have not been integrated into her character. They’re a free-standing gag, and that gag cannot last long.³⁵⁸

As the above passage makes clear, Heffernan’s reservations on the subject of costuming in Ugly Betty echo concerns discussed in previous chapters that costume should always ‘make sense’ for the character. For Heffernan, the ‘over-the-top’ or ‘excessive’ clothing is problematic as it does not ‘serve’ Betty’s [America Ferrera] character. As such, she implicitly supports those more traditional screen hierarchies which privilege narrative and character over mise-en-scene. Within this chapter however, I argue that an alternative reading is possible, and that the reason it may seem that fashion is working against character is precisely because Ugly Betty relies upon an ‘excessive’, ‘camp’ aesthetic which is bound up with construction and performance. In so doing, the show adopts an ambiguous attitude towards the notion of the ‘authentic’ self – at times entirely rejecting it in favour of an ‘image-based’ identity which it presents as potentially subversive and

³⁵⁵ Betty Suarez, ‘There’s No Place Like Mode’ Season Three, Episode Fifteen

³⁵⁶ Justin Suarez ‘Smoking Hot’ Season Four, Episode Fourteen

³⁵⁷ Tom Gliatto (2nd October, 2006) People, p.45

³⁵⁸ Virginia Heffernan (28th September, 2006) ‘A Plucky Guppy Among the Barracudas’ New York Times http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/28/arts/television/28heff.html?_r=1&ex=1159588800&en=758878b6cbc1424b&ei=5087%0A, (accessed 22/4/10)

resistive. As such, the show challenges the assumption that the so-called postmodern self is both 'flat' and 'superficial'.

There has been a tendency within previous scholarship to view onscreen fashion as either expressive (of identity) or excessive (somehow overshadowing and simultaneously concealing identity). The term 'excessive' has further implications than previously acknowledged given that it is not only a gendered term, but also has been associated with a specific ethnic femininity and engages with discourses of taste and respectability. With regard to Ugly Betty, the 'excessive' costuming is bound up with each of these definitions. This chapter argues that the use of 'camp'/'excessive' costuming is used in order to continually question and ultimately complicate the assumption that fashion is 'trivial' and 'inconsequential'.

Therefore, this chapter offers a brief discussion of the comedy genre, exploring the ways in which comedy has previously been understood as both as a 'mode' and a 'discrete' genre, before demonstrating the importance of comedy to the show's generic identity and its treatment of fashion and the fashion industry. The next section focuses on how the comedy and 'excessive' costume are used both to express discourses of gender and ethnicity, and also interrogate assumptions which view fashion as 'trivial' and 'shallow'. This involves close textual analysis of a collection of episodes across all four seasons. While I would argue that notions of fashion and triviality are crucial to the show's central themes, I have selected episodes which specifically foreground these debates as a part of their narrative focus. That said, I believe the episodes discussed below to be a fair representation of the show's generic and aesthetic identity.

'TV's Most Fashionable Comedy': Genre and Comedy

Ugly Betty is the US adaptation of the Colombian telenovela Yo soy Betty, la fea (I am Betty, the ugly one) (1991-2001). In her article 'The Bettyer way to success', Bianca Lippert notes that the US version of the telenovela was reworked to appeal to home audiences who are 'more used to watching weekly network serials with high production values than a daily mass produced telenovela'.³⁵⁹ Lippert's article reveals some important points regarding genre insofar as it indicates that the US reworking of Yo soy Betty, la fea

³⁵⁹ Bianca Lippert (2008) 'The 'Bettyer' Way to Success', Critical Studies in Television: Scholarly Studies in Small Screen Fictions, 3:2, p. 24

resulted in a generic shift from the telenovela to what Lippert terms a ‘prime-time Latin-American style dramedy’ (identifying criteria which she claims marks Ugly Betty as a comedy drama, rather than telenovela, i.e., high production values and scheduling). While I do not wish to disagree with Lippert’s generic reading of Ugly Betty, it is important to note, as Creeber does in The Television Genre Book, that ‘it would be wrong to suggest that the use of genre is always this simple’.³⁶⁰ As such, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the textualist approach to genre and begin, as Mittell suggests, to think about the discursive practices that surround texts.³⁶¹ Only then do the intricacies of television genres begin to appear, and it becomes possible to think about the historical and cultural specificities of genre.

Significantly, in the US reworking of Yo soy Betty, la fea, the element which remained unaltered from the original was the use of comedy. According to executive producer Salma Hayek, it was the comedy which she felt would translate to American audiences. She claims ‘I was a big fan of Betty, la fea because it was different – it was very funny. So we thought this would be the perfect bridge’.³⁶² This then, raises a series of issues about the precise nature of comedy’s relationship to genre.

Scholars including Feuer and Brett Mills³⁶³ have argued that the sitcom is often thought to be a simple genre ‘whose structure and content appears to be merely “known” by both industry and audience’.³⁶⁴ However, it becomes apparent within academic discourse that there is some disparity over the precise way in which comedy interacts with genre. For example, Neale and Krutnik posit that comedy is a ‘mode’ which is employed by other genres³⁶⁵. However, this implies that the comedy drama is primarily a drama which uses and contains comic elements and this is most certainly not the case with Ugly Betty, whose comedic elements are *integral* to the show’s narrative, aesthetic, style and tone. Packaging for the season three DVD box set boasts that the show is ‘TV’s most fashionable comedy’. As such, it is important, as Mills suggests, to make a distinction ‘between comedy as a general mode and those forms whose main aim is humour and whose contents are most

³⁶⁰ Glen Creeber (2001) The Television Genre Book, London: BFI, p. 1

³⁶¹ Mittell, ‘A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory’, p. 8

³⁶² Benji Wilson (31 December 2006) ‘Ugly Betty’, Observer p. 7

³⁶³ Jane Feuer (1992) ‘Genre Study and Television’ in Robert C Allen (eds) Channels of Discourse, Reassembled, London: Routledge pp. 138-160, Brett Mills (2005) Television Sitcom, London: BFI

³⁶⁴ Mills, Television Sitcom, p. 26

³⁶⁵ Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik (1990) Popular Film and Television Comedy, London and New York: Routledge

appropriate to that goal.’³⁶⁶ Indeed, it could be argued then, that Yo soy Betty, la fea uses comedy as a ‘mode’ which is contained by the show’s melodramatic moments and Ugly Betty shares similarities with the sitcom – the primary aim of which is ‘one centred on its humour’.³⁶⁷ Therefore it is perhaps best to categorise Ugly Betty as ‘a genre defined by its comic impetus, for it is this comic aspect upon which...all of its textual elements rely.’³⁶⁸ As this chapter shall demonstrate, comedy can be understood as a driving force within Ugly Betty and works to shape both narrative and visual aesthetic. Moreover, I suggest that the comedy within Ugly Betty affects the way in which fashion functions, not only with regard to identity construction, but also how can be used to educate an audience of potential consumers on appropriate fashion and consumption practices.

Elements of drama within Ugly Betty are often underscored by more comedic elements. In addition, moments of intense emotion are often short lived and concluded with a comical end. For instance, in ‘There’s no place like Mode’ (season three, episode 15) Betty is required to produce a fashion show for new designer, ‘The Heinrich’. During the process, Betty realises that Heinrich’s designs, which she’d previously thought ridiculous (dresses made of barbed wire and glass) actually serve as a metaphor, representing his life behind the iron curtain. As she talks to Heinrich about his experiences behind the Berlin Wall both the music and Betty’s performance in this scene signals its seriousness and maximises the emotional impact. However, this heartfelt scene is abruptly ended as the music changes, becoming more upbeat, and Heinrich oddly says ‘Now we will make love’. Elements of melodrama then, are essential in creating the comedy within the show; moreover, in numerous episodes melodrama itself becomes subject to ridicule.³⁶⁹

The treatment of melodrama in Ugly Betty is important for, as previously mentioned, the show is based on a telenovela which as Janet McCabe and Kim Akass write is characterised by a ‘distinctive look and outlandish plots.’³⁷⁰ Indeed, the US version also

³⁶⁶ Mills, Television Sitcom, p. 25

³⁶⁷ Mills, Television Sitcom, p. 19

³⁶⁸ Brett Mills (2009) The Sitcom, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press p. 6

³⁶⁹ I am using John Mercer and Martin Shingler’s definition of melodrama. For Mercer and Shingler, the melodrama is characterised by the way in which ‘action is worked up to bold climaxes...swinging suddenly from one emotion to its extreme opposite’ Moreover, they claim that a key feature of the melodrama is ‘its dependence upon an established system of non-verbal signs, gesture, *mise-en-scene* (sets, props, costume and lighting) and music.’ In John Mercer and Martin Shingler (2004) Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility, London: Wallflower

³⁷⁰ Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (2007) ‘Not So Ugly: Local Production, Global Franchise, Discursive Feminities, and the Ugly Betty Phenomenon’ www.flowtv.org (accessed 16/03/2008)

employs these signature motifs of the telenovela, however they are repackaged and presented as comedy. Ugly Betty's distinctive use of colour references the telenovela aesthetic (for example, both Betty's fashion sense and family home in Queens consist of bright bold colours associated with the genre). However, arguably the use of colour within Ugly Betty could be read as having an additional meaning. It could be argued that the bold colours, most notably reds, greens and yellows, express the tone and mood of the show and serve to represent Betty's Latina identity (and indirectly her social class which I will return to shortly). Indeed, Betty's Latina identity is central to the premise of Ugly Betty which employs a 'fish-out-of-water' narrative. Moreover, it is also crucial to the show's humour which seeks to draw attention to, and ridicule the elitist nature of the fashion industry.

Indeed, I would posit that within the comedic context of Ugly Betty, the use of colour also seeks to exaggerate cultural stereotypes in order to comment on, and ridicule cultural ignorance of racial and ethnic difference. For example, the hyperbolic representation of certain stereotypes occurs in the setting of the offices of Mode magazine. The Mode offices in Manhattan are notably white, which allows for Betty's brightly coloured costume to 'stand out' onscreen and thereby visually demonstrates Betty's inability to fit in at Mode. Moreover, I would also suggest that the aesthetic of the Mode offices makes a comment about some of the more ridiculous aspects of the fashion industry. Within the show the look of the office is mocked by Betty's family. When Betty's sister, Hilda (Ana Ortiz), visits Betty at work she remarks that the office 'looks like a gay version of Star Trek.' The office space therefore, reflects the way in which fashion industry is sometimes understood in the 'real' world as 'excessive', 'impractical' and 'ridiculous'.

According to Mills 'the notion of excess is vital to comedy, and is a central principle of sitcom'.³⁷¹ He contends that excess can be located in 'performance, but it can also be seen in the way in which the sitcom is shot, and what it does when it draws on the conventions of other forms'.³⁷² Within Ugly Betty, notions of excess resonate with these aspects, with its dramatic camera angles and elaborate editing techniques (often in the form of wipes coupled with extra-diegetic sound effects), however I would also highlight how excess is

³⁷¹ Mills, Television Sitcom, p. 33

³⁷² Mills, Television Sitcom, p. 33

also apparent in the mise-en-scene. Furthermore, notions of excess within Ugly Betty illustrate ‘carnavalesque tendencies’.³⁷³

According to Kathleen Rowe, ‘the carnivalesque is...not a form of “mere” play but involves matters of philosophical and social import – struggles of social and political power.’³⁷⁴ Indeed, Ugly Betty’s carnivalesque tendencies also serve to foreground and comment on power struggles and inequality within the fashion industry. As the title suggests, the show is preoccupied with notions of appropriate beauty, and the circulation of these dominant ideologies in society. The character of Betty then, becomes the central site onto which these concerns are mapped. Her ethnicity and physicality present her as ‘the other’ within the world of Mode. Therefore, within the fashion world, Betty can be considered an ‘unruly woman’ and this is reflected through her costume.³⁷⁵

It is important to note that Betty’s costuming works to signal her difference, and as such is bound up specifically with notions of ethnic difference. Betty’s Mexican identity informs her costuming insofar as it often incorporates bright colours (reds, yellows and greens) which have been traditionally associated with the Mexican national identity. In some cases however, there are more explicit references to Betty’s Mexican identity. In the pilot episode, for example, Betty is attempting to choose an appropriate outfit to wear to for her first day at Mode. Having learned from an employee that Ponchos are fashionable, she arrives on her first day in a bright red and teal woollen Poncho with the word ‘Guadalajara’ written in the centre. Thus, the poncho is in stark contrast to the muted shade worn by the Mode employee in an earlier scene. The outfit not only signals ‘excess’ insofar as the vibrant colours stand out against the white Mode building backdrop but is also expressive of Betty’s ethnic identity.

In her book, Dress and Ethnicity, Joanne Eicher describes how often studies of fashion focus on ‘western dress’, and claims that ‘little or no concern is given to the rest of the world’.³⁷⁶ The scope of this scholarship is further limited by the definition of ‘western dress’ which does not include ‘the west’ in its entirety, but rather she writes, ‘Western’

³⁷³ Kathleen Rowe (1995) The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 32

³⁷⁴ Rowe, The Unruly Woman, p. 32

³⁷⁵ Rowe, The Unruly Woman

³⁷⁶ Joanne Eicher (1995) Dress and Ethnicity: Change Across Space and Time, Oxford: Berg, p. 4

dress ‘represents a style with origins in the tailored garments of Euro-Americans’.³⁷⁷ This, she asserts, has resulted in the perpetuation of the assumption that ‘dress outside of western civilization has experienced little change and is therefore “traditional”’.³⁷⁸ I would therefore add that ‘ethnic dress’ can be considered ‘outside’ of fashion as it is supposedly ‘unchanging’ and of course, the notion of change is understood as the key defining feature of fashion.

Often, this perception of ethnicity and fashion is played within Ugly Betty insofar as Betty’s style is coded as ethnic (regardless of whether or not she is wearing ‘traditional’ ethnic dress). In so doing, the show acknowledges the notion that ethnic dress is ‘unfashionable’ and uses humour to comment upon it. Exchanges between Marc (Michael Urie) and Amanda (Becki Newton) continually reference Betty’s ethnicity when they are ridiculing her fashion sense. In season four, when Amanda accuses Marc of becoming less fashion conscious she claims, ‘you’re transmexifying before our very eyes’. Therefore, Betty’s Mexican identity becomes synonymous with her ‘unfashionability’ and a notion of ‘excess’.

Betty’s excess in both body and fashion is often the source of comedy within the Mode offices. This is not to suggest that this is how Betty is intended to be read by viewers, however, arguably there are moments when the audience are also invited to laugh at Betty’s unruliness and excess, for the most part this involves more slapstick elements as she continually trips, walks into glass doors and knocks things over. However, there is a particular episode which, it could be argued, invites the audience to laugh at Betty’s physical appearance. In the episode ‘Queens for a Day’, (season one, episode three) Betty, in an attempt to become more fashionable, seeks the advice of her sister Hilda, who suggests that Betty gets a makeover. Betty visits a salon in Queens and we see a montage of shots of Betty getting her hair washed, nails manicured and make up applied. In the final shot of the montage, the camera pans from Betty’s feet to her face revealing her new look. Betty is wearing a lime green faux snakeskin skirt and a one shoulder floral lycra top accessorised with large gold and red hoop earrings. Her hair has been permed and backcombed into an enormous ‘updo’, and she is wearing long acrylic false nails. The music accompanying the revealing shot signals that Betty’s new look is to be interpreted as

³⁷⁷ Eicher, Dress and Ethnicity, p. 4

³⁷⁸ Eicher, Dress and Ethnicity, p. 4

comical and it self consciously comments on the makeover narrative.³⁷⁹ The combination of bright colours, figure hugging fabrics is supposedly used with the intention of making her look ‘excessive’, or even ‘grotesque’.

It could therefore be argued that the audience is cued to understand that Betty’s new look will not be received positively by her co-workers and a comedy scenario will ensue. However, while the audience is invited to laugh at Betty during this scene, when she arrives in a meeting with the staff at Mode, Betty is publicly and cruelly humiliated by Wilhelmina (Vanessa Williams) - who describes the outfit as looking ‘as if Queens threw up’ - the mood shifts immediately and, I would argue that the scene is not designed to be read as comical. Furthermore, the apparent change in mood signals that the audience are invited to share in Betty’s embarrassment and perhaps feel regret for laughing at her earlier in the episode.

In addition, this episode typifies the way in which Ugly Betty negotiates concerns regarding the use of fashion onscreen as potentially threatening the narrative economy. In her study of costume and narrative, Jane Gaines suggests that ‘narrative realism dictates that costume be curtailed by conventional dress codes’,³⁸⁰ indicating that those genres which privilege realism would find fashion problematic. Her study also touches on the relationship between fashion and genre, albeit in relation to cinema, and claims that 1950s melodramas allowed for onscreen wardrobes to push the boundaries of ‘realism’ as the genre is characterised by its ‘rhetoric excess’.³⁸¹ Similarly Ugly Betty’s position as a comedy drama indicates that there is more scope for creativity. However, Ugly Betty’s position as fashion programming complicates this understanding. Indeed, the costume designer Eduardo Castro is subject to competing creative and commercial pressures which affect the display of onscreen fashion and, as with Sex and the City and The O.C., Ugly Betty functions to critique but ultimately celebrate fashion; addressing its viewers as potential consumers. In so doing, the show is obliged to present the onscreen fashion as in some way ‘desirable’. Unlike the previous case studies, Ugly Betty uses comedy and, more specifically, parody to do so which could potentially result in fashion (and the fashion industry) becoming an object of ridicule. For example, Betty’s onscreen wardrobe consists

³⁷⁹ Even in the final series Betty’s transformation (she changes her hair, has her braces removed and changes her glasses) happens gradually avoiding a ‘reveal’ in the final episode.

³⁸⁰ Gaines, ‘Costume and Narrative’, p. 196

³⁸¹ Peter Brooks in Gaines, ‘Costume and Narrative’, p. 204

of designer clothes (the one shoulder top in ‘Queens for a Day’ was Roberto Cavalli) and while the clashing patterns and colours are read by her fashionable co-workers as ‘garish’ and ‘unattractive’ (which in itself contributes to the comedy of the show), the show provides a dual address which allows certain viewers (perhaps those with an interest and knowledge of fashion) to make the distinction between ‘ugly clothes’ and a lack of personal style. In other words, Betty’s wardrobe can appear garish and visual arresting not because the clothes are unattractive, but because of the ways in which garments are put together (her brightly coloured top is paired with an equally bright snakeskin skirt). Thus, if read in this context, it is not her fashion which is to be laughed at, but her lack of consumer/fashion competences. Indeed, this sophisticated use of comedy, which allows fashion to be both critiqued and celebrated is not limited to Ugly Betty. In the introduction to her book Fashion Media Promotion, Jayne Sheridan opens with an anecdote about how ‘the Fashion set loved *Absolutely Fabulous* because it was ‘*so right*’...without revealing any of Fashion’s secrets, *Ab Fab* had recreated much of its mystique.’³⁸² The Fashion world could enjoy parody’. A useful comparison can therefore be made then, between Ugly Betty and British comedy series, Absolutely Fabulous (1994-2002) in the ways in which both shows use comedy and spectacle to both recreate the mystique surrounding the fashion industry and ultimately celebrate fashion.

Comedy, Consumption and Excess

While some scholars have argued that onscreen fashion functioning as spectacle is problematic, Ugly Betty’s genre relies on a visual excess in order to create comical moments. Furthermore, notions of excess are not only used in Ugly Betty’s aesthetic, but are also examined and critiqued within the narrative. As this section demonstrates, notions of excess in relation to consumer practices are a central concern in Ugly Betty.

The ‘Queens for a Day’ episode not only demonstrates Betty’s lack of knowledge regarding appropriate fashion, but it also establishes how fashion operates in relation to place. Both Queens and Manhattan are presented as having conflicting understandings of ‘appropriate’ fashion and excess, which are bound up with notions of class. Whereas Manhattan is imagined as a ‘style centre’ that is both economically and culturally elite, Queens is characterised as a vibrant, ‘inclusive’, ethnically diverse community. In ‘Queens

³⁸² Jayne Sheridan (2010) Fashion Media Promotion: The New Black Magic, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 1

for a Day' when walking out of the salon, Betty catches the attention of a builder who 'wolf whistles'. She asks him if he is whistling at her and when he nods, she is overcome with gratitude. This scene is significant as it demonstrates that while Betty's look is deemed to be excessive within the Mode offices (and I would argue, by the audience, given the way in which Betty's reveal is executed), it is apparent that her look is celebrated in her home district of Queens. The relationship between fashion and Queens is perhaps made most explicit with regard to Hilda's relationship to fashion.

Hilda's wardrobe consists of tight, brightly coloured, low cut tops and skin tight trousers, in addition to animal prints and heavy gold jewellery; costume designer Eduardo Castro describes her as possessing 'that loud Queens taste'.³⁸³ Thus, her style demonstrates a 'resistance' to legitimate taste. While it is clear that Hilda takes an interest in fashion, and has an individual style, it is also apparent that she doesn't care about high fashion or designer clothes and will unabashedly wear 'knock-offs'. Indeed, Hilda's style could be considered 'excessive' insofar as the kinds of clothes she wears are overtly sexual, drawing attention to her body, and as with Betty, signify her 'ethnicity' and 'otherness', representing an albeit 'Americanised' version of her Mexican identity.

Moreover, as with Betty, Hilda's wardrobe also incorporates designer pieces. Costume designer Eduardo Castro explains in the show's official companion Mode: The Ugly Betty Book, that he uses high-end designers including D&G and Roberto Cavalli for Hilda, and claims he decided to use designer clothes (despite the fact that the character would not be able to afford them) because '[t]he clothes are a little more refined, and on camera, they just look great'.³⁸⁴ Thus, Castro suggests that as with Betty's costuming, the designer pieces are not necessarily designed to look unattractive. However, while Betty's lack of style can be considered central to the show's comedy, Hilda's personal style (while in some ways coded as 'excessive') is celebrated for its individuality. In a series of ways, Hilda's approach to fashion demonstrates both 'reason' and 'choice' (i.e. she will wear what she likes, regardless of what fashion magazines will tell her).

In his book, Consumer Culture and Modernity, Slater claims that the consumer is represented as either 'an irrational slave to trivial, materialistic desires' or as a

³⁸³ Eduardo Castro quoted in Libby Slate (2006) 'Dressing Off, Not Ugly, Makes Betty a Fashion Free Thinker', Emmy, p. 16

³⁸⁴ Eduardo Castro quoted in Ann Donahue (2008) Mode: The Ugly Betty Book, Bantom Books: London, p. 142

‘hero...rationally pursuing their self defined interests through a mechanism (the market) that socially coordinates individuals’ actions without compromising the autonomy of their choices.’³⁸⁵ Slater observes that these representations of the consumer are perceived to be gendered (the ‘irrational slave’ being coded as female and the ‘hero’ as male). Here, Hilda’s freedom of choice in the consumer market challenges these long standing assumptions. However her disparagement of the fashion industry is not simply rooted in her understanding that she can look good for less, indeed, it is rather more complex.

In the episode ‘Burning Questions’ (season two, episode 15), Hilda’s rejection of high fashion is called into question. In this particular episode, Hilda’s ex-next door neighbour and ‘lifetime nemesis’ Gina Gambarro (Ava Gaudet) visits Hilda’s beauty salon for a manicure. Since leaving Queens, Gina has married a wealthy doctor and as such is able to indulge in designer clothes. Her return is signalled by a montage which fetishizes the designer clothes and accessories she is wearing. Close-ups of oversized gold Chanel earrings, two ‘chunky’ Chanel necklaces and a Gucci belt are accompanied by a hip hop track which continually repeats the word ‘ca-ching’. The camera then reveals Gina, who is wearing the accessories mentioned above with a leopard skin mini skirt, bronze suit jacket and a gold ruffle-necked blouse.

Gina’s fashion is signalled as excess. The montage and soundtrack signal Gina’s ‘conspicuous consumption’³⁸⁶ as vulgar and this is, of course, connected to her display of sexuality. Similarly, the way in which Gina talks about her new look indicates that she participates in designer fashion practices to demonstrate her wealth. When Hilda makes a comment about Gina putting on weight, Gina says ‘You’re just not used to seeing designer clothes. Roomier is a look you pay for.’ This comment could be construed as comedic as her clothes are quite obviously tightly fitted.

Throughout her visit Gina divulges information about her new lifestyle, boasting about the amount of money she has to spend on clothes. Upon leaving, Gina promises to return the following day for a pedicure which prompts Hilda to visit Betty at the Mode offices in order to borrow designer clothes and accessories from the magazine’s closet. The beginning of this scene also begins with a montage of designer shoes and clothes being picked from rails, thereby creating a comparison between this sequence and the montage

³⁸⁵ Slater, Consumer Culture and Modernity, p. 44

³⁸⁶ Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class

before Gina's arrival. The soundtrack however, is notably different, using an upbeat Latin track to accompany the shots of various garments.

As Hilda negotiates her way around the infinite rails in the Mode closet, Betty follows asking why she feels the need to 'dress up' for Gina. Gesturing towards the racks, she remarks 'Don't tell Justin I said this, but you know none of this stuff actually means anything.' To which, Hilda replies 'I know that...but what do I have to show for myself'. This scene then, demonstrates that while, for the most part, Hilda appears content with her own style and takes pleasure in participating in her own individual fashion practices, she also acknowledges that these fashion practices are rooted in the popular, and will be judged by the fashion cognoscenti. Hilda is therefore aware that her own fashion practices are not considered to be 'legitimate'.

When Gina returns to the salon, the camera pans up from Hilda's feet to reveal a tightly fitted red dress, zebra skin belt and gold shoes. Hilda's designer look is not that different from her regular style, which indicates that Hilda individualises high fashion in a way that Gina does not. Gina then instructs Hilda that she 'can put [her] Pradas anywhere'. Hilda inspects the shoe briefly, before removing her own and concluding that Gina's shoe is in fact a 'knock off' – she claims 'this is Prada' (gesturing toward her own shoe), 'this is nada' (Gina's shoe). The scene ends with Gina storming out of the salon with her husband, who is in fact a chiropractor rather than doctor. Before he leaves, he turns to Hilda and says 'if you get your kicks out of making my wife feel lousy then your life must be pretty sad.' The camera then returns to Hilda whose expression demonstrates that she is hurt by the comment.

This sequence then, serves to reveal Hilda's ambivalent relationship with fashion. As previously argued, Hilda acknowledges in this scene that her consumer practices would be criticised by the fashion cognoscenti – in the same way that she criticises Gina for her 'fake-ass clothes' and thus, the *value* of high fashion is called into question within this episode. For example, while Betty and Hilda are acknowledging that fashion 'doesn't mean anything', the use of close ups and frenetic camera movements glamorises the garments, drawing attention to the spectacle of Hilda's 'shopping' experience. This contradictory attitude towards fashion and consumption is central to Ugly Betty. Each character within Ugly Betty has a different relationship to fashion and represent different stereotypes of

consumers. Justin Suarez (Betty's nephew played by Mark Indelicato), for example, is presented as a sophisticated consumer and has a very different relationship to fashion than the rest of his family. Unlike Hilda, Justin takes a keen interest in the fashion industry and in the pilot episode, Justin's knowledge and consumer competences are foregrounded as he educates Betty about Mode and offers his critique of the first issue published with Daniel Meade (Eric Mabius) as editor.

Justin's character has received a great deal of attention from fans and critics alike regarding the possibility that he could be the 'youngest gay character in television'.³⁸⁷ While the show does not explore Justin's sexuality until season four, his performance of gender throughout the first three seasons has been termed by Hector Amaya as 'disruptive [and] excessive'.³⁸⁸ However, I would suggest that it is not simply Justin's gender performance that makes him 'excessive', but rather the disruption of both his ethnicity and class identity, which is signalled by his relationship with fashion. Indeed, I would argue that it is his relationship to fashion and consumption which contributes to Justin's 'excessive' and 'disruptive' identity and generates much of the humour in Ugly Betty. Ugly Betty relies on the cultural assumption that someone of Justin's gender, ethnicity and class background is unlikely to have the cultural competences to enable him to demonstrate an appreciation and understanding of traditionally white, middle-class world of high fashion. To use Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' then,³⁸⁹ Justin's ability to participate in fashion practices, and his knowledge of high fashion, is at odds with his social background, especially given that '[t]his realistic structure of dispositions – the habitus – is learned through a family and community steeped in class experiences'.³⁹⁰ As demonstrated in the discussion of Betty and Hilda's relationship with fashion, Justin's family are presented as products of their habitus insofar as neither values fashion – to them it is unnecessary. As a result both Betty and Hilda negotiate a relationship with the fashion industry which is contained by what Slater describes as 'an inner sense of appropriate aspiration and how to act upon it'.³⁹¹ Justin's resistance to his 'inner sense of appropriate aspiration' is then, central to the way in which he is presented as 'disruptive'.

³⁸⁷ Hector Amaya (2007) 'Queering Justin', www.flowtv.org (accessed 16/03/2009)

³⁸⁸ Amaya, 'Queering Justin'

³⁸⁹ Bourdieu, Distinction

³⁹⁰ Slater, Consumer Culture and Modernity, p. 161

³⁹¹ Slater, Consumer Culture and Modernity, p. 161

The performance of Justin's 'disruptive' and 'excessive' character serves to initiate some of the jokes within Ugly Betty. It is his transgression of social boundaries which creates humour, however, this is not to suggest that his 'excess' is marked as ridiculous within the show, indeed, it is celebrated. As previously mentioned, Justin's consumer competences are apparent from the first episode, and are garnered throughout the series. In the episode 'Fey's Sleigh Ride' (season one, episode four), Justin accompanies Betty to Mode under the pretence that he is researching a school project about a person whose jobs he admires. On entering the Mode building Justin and Betty are joined in an elevator with Marc and Amanda. The pair initially completely ignore Justin and focus on insulting Betty before Justin looks at Amanda's feet and says 'Oh my God, Manolo Blahnik's, 2004!' To Amanda's horror, Marc also looks at her shoes noting 'two year old shoes. Even I didn't catch that.' Justin's knowledge of fashion in this scene, therefore, is the cause of the humour, but it is not at his expense. In addition, it also indicates that his 'excessive' gender, characterised by his consumer competences, is entirely appropriate within the fashion world.

In 'How Betty Got Her Grieve Back' (season two, episode one) Justin plays truant from camp in order to spend time at the Mode office. In a scene in which Wilhelmina is becoming increasingly irate with her staff as they fail to produce a look for a photo-shoot, Justin, hiding behind a rack of clothing tries to whisper helpful suggestions to the stylist (he suggests that she remove a belt from the model). On hearing the suggestion, Wilhelmina discovers Justin and nicknames him 'the fashion elf', as he is the only person in a room full of professionals who 'knows anything about fashion'. Justin therefore, demonstrates that he does not have an unquestioning appreciation for fashion, but rather is capable of critiquing and evaluating it. Moreover, as the quote from 'Smoking Hot' (season four, episode 14) cited in the opening of this chapter demonstrates, he educates Betty in *performing* 'good taste'.

Another character in Ugly Betty occupies a similar role in working through issues of class and consumer competences. Christina McKinney (Ashley Jensen) is a seamstress at Mode who befriends Betty in the cafeteria on her first day. Like Betty, Christina is different from other 'Mode girls'. While her regional accent obscures her class identity, it is clear that like Betty, Christina's national identity codes her as 'other'. This is also signalled by her job, her wardrobe – which is more Bohemian and starkly contrasted with the Mode girls – and

her Scottish accent. The actress Ashley Jensen reportedly auditioned for the part in an American accent. However, the show's producers felt that her native Scottish accent suited the character (presumably because it signalled her 'otherness').

Christina performs an important function within the show as she works as a mediator for both Betty, and arguably the audience, in demonstrating how the fashion industry should be understood. In the pilot episode, Betty visits Christina in the closet at Mode and the pair have a conversation about the fashion industry. During the conversation, Betty touches a nearby brown dress on a mannequin and comments on the roughness of the fabric. To which Christina remarks 'It's burlap. Basically you're talking \$7000 dollars for a potato sack!' Betty then remarks how she can't believe people will pay that amount of money for an outfit. Christina then replies 'I can't believe they wear it! And probably only once before they chuck it to make room for the next season. But that's the crazy world of fashion and I have to say I love it.' Her remark indicates that Christina is able to appreciate some elements of the fashion industry, while also acknowledging that others, such as the price of some of the garments, are ridiculous. Indeed, this is the central theme in Ugly Betty; the show uses comedy, as in the exchange mentioned above, to lampoon the more ridiculous aspects of the industry while simultaneously celebrating its function as a 'pleasurable' activity. Christina's character is thus central to this agenda.

As a seamstress, she occupies a servile role, however, her ambition to be a designer allows her to negotiate her social class in a similar way to Justin. Furthermore, it arguably allows her to occupy a more privileged position as she is associated with the more masculine and legitimate sphere of production, as opposed to consumption which, as discussed in previous chapters, is coded as 'feminine'. All this contributes to her role as the voice of reason for both Betty and the audience. While she represents the 'ordinary person', she also has acquired the cultural competences to evaluate and critique fashion through her aspirations to be a designer.

Amanda Tanen however, is positioned in opposition to Christina, and as a result becomes the object of her ridicule. Amanda is characterised as an irresponsible consumer. Contrary to Christina, Amanda is coded as *nouvelle riche*. In season one, it becomes apparent that Amanda's parents (who are actually her adopted parents) have spoiled her and while she has the economic capital to consume high fashion, it is made apparent that she lacks

cultural capital. To be sure, her onscreen clothes are ‘ultra-fashionable’, however they lack the individuality apparent in Christina’s wardrobe. She often wears muted colours, such as blacks, grey and whites, which present her as a blank canvas, devoid of creativity.

In the episode ‘Icing on the Cake’ (season one, episode 17), Amanda receives a dress from designer Oswald Lorenzo which is skin tight and mad entirely out of rubber. Amanda refuses to take off the dress, despite the fact that renders her completely unable to move around, and leaves her with ‘rubber burns’ all over her body. Amanda therefore, follows fashion with an unquestioning obedience. Moreover, her inability to evaluate fashion for herself is demonstrated in ‘There’s No Place Like Mode’ (season three, episode 15). When Betty initially has to write a press release for the previously unknown Heinrich, she asks Amanda if she’s heard of him. Amanda says ‘No, he must suck’. Later on in the episode, after Betty’s press release has thrust Heinrich into the limelight, the following exchange takes place

Amanda: ‘Betty, you have to get me into the Heinrich show, he is like my favourite designer in the whole world.’

Betty: ‘Didn’t you say that you didn’t know who he was?’

Amanda (laughs): ‘Someone’s been hitting the tequila again.’

Amanda (addressing Betty’s writing partner Matt): ‘It’s like mother’s milk to her’

Amanda: ‘Betty, Heinrich is all anyone’s been talking about so that means he’s good obvi.’ (sic)

Within this comical exchange it is apparent that Amanda is primarily concerned with appearing to keep up to date with fashion and thus lacks the ability to practice discrimination. She doesn’t want to be exposed as ‘out of the loop’, whereas Christina, as indicated in her comment about the burlap dress, dislikes the ephemeral nature of the fashion industry and the way in which garments are discarded from season to season. Furthermore, this exchange seeks to highlight Amanda’s lack of cultural capital as she forms her opinion that Heinrich is good without even seeing his work.

Each of the characters within Ugly Betty are somewhat hyperbolic which contributes to the construction of fashion and the fashion industry as ‘camp’ and ‘excessive’. That said however, the characters discussed above foster a complex relationship to fashion and consumption - and this is played out through the use of excessive costuming and camp performativity. These elements are crucial to the overall aesthetic, genre and characterisation of Ugly Betty. As previously discussed, the nature of the humour at work

within Ugly Betty, impacts upon the way in which fashion and costume are used, and marks its difference from the other case studies examined here. Indeed, SATC is also identified within press discourses as a comedy drama, yet its humour is confined for the most part to witty dialogue. Ugly Betty, on the other hand, relies upon visual gags which are provided by the ‘excessive’ use of fashion. That said, it is not simply that the show seeks to ridicule fashion or the fashion industry, rather that the comedy within Ugly Betty also serves to emphasise the significance of fashion – particularly with regard to its relationship with identity.

While the hyperbolic and excessive fashion within the show results in the ultimate rejection of the ‘authentic’ identity, it does so in order to celebrate the way in which fashion can be used by some individuals to manipulate identity. Indeed, as discussed above the relationship between fashion and ethnicity is central to Ugly Betty, insofar as the show challenges existing notions regarding ethnicity as inherently unfashionable and in so doing, demonstrates the importance of fashion. Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that the ability to use fashion to make and remake identity is only afforded to those with the cultural knowledge and competences in fashion practices. Justin and Christina for example, are presented as possessing the necessary consumer competences and in addition, demonstrate the ‘pure gaze’ insofar as both are able to appreciate the ‘aesthetic value’ of fashion. Amanda and Hilda however, are partially excluded from this, as neither character demonstrates the cultural capital, nor aesthetic disposition, required.

To be sure, Ugly Betty differs in its use of fashion from the other case studies, which as this chapter has demonstrated, is at least in part due to its position as a comedy series. However, as with SATC and The O.C., the show seeks to illustrate the resistive potential of fashion in the performance of identity. Indeed, the understanding that fashion is in some way crucial to the expression of identity is key, not only within the texts examined here, but also within the extra-textual discourse surrounding the shows. As the following section makes clear, the themes articulated within these three case studies continue to play an important role in the construction of the star personae of the lead characters.

Section Three: Fashioning Celebrity

‘[T]he body gives existence to the dress.’³⁹²

The final section of this thesis examines the symbolic meaning of onscreen fashion as it moves beyond the text, into the realm of television and celebrity culture. As demonstrated in the previous section, fashion is designed to communicate the cultural identity of its wearer. However, it is also important to bear in mind that the body of the wearer is also crucial to the construction of cultural identity and the meaning making process. In the introduction to *Fabrications*, Gaines, drawing on Barthes, observes that ‘the body gives existence to the dress’. This section considers the celebrity wearer of fashion, both on and offscreen.³⁹³ It examines the cultural function of the celebrity image and its relationship to fashion, and particularly fashion programming. Each chapter focuses on a specific celebrity image as a case study (from each of the television shows examined in the previous section); Sarah Jessica Parker, Adam Brody and America Ferrera.

As discussed in section two, fashion programming requires an audience adept at *reading* fashion. This section continues to explore this theme and examines how the construction and circulation of the celebrity image in extra-textual material serves to educate audiences about fashion, taste and consumption practices. In other words, Sarah Jessica Parker, Adam Brody and America Ferrera function to a certain extent, as ‘cultural intermediaries’. This term has been subject to debate and, as David Hesmondhalgh argues, misinterpretation. For example, in his 2006 article ‘Bourdieu, the Media and Cultural Production,’ Hesmondhalgh accuses Keith Negus, Sean Nixon and Mike Featherstone of misusing the term.³⁹⁴ He suggests that Bourdieu intended the term to describe ‘a particular type of new petite bourgeoisie profession, associated with cultural commentary in the mass media,’³⁹⁵ and purports that Featherstone ‘equates the new petite bourgeoisie with a small sub-set of that social class, the (new) cultural intermediaries.’³⁹⁶ This conflation between the ‘new

³⁹² Jane Gaines (1990) ‘Introduction: Fabricating the Female Body’: in Gaines and Herzog (eds) *Fabrications*, London & New York, p. 2

³⁹³ Here, I use the term star and celebrity interchangeably to reflect the increasingly blurred boundaries between the two categories of fame.

³⁹⁴ Mike Featherstone (1991) *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, London: Sage, Keith Negus (2002) ‘The Work of Cultural Intermediaries and the Enduring Distance Between Production and Consumption’, in *Cultural Studies*, 16:4, pp. 501-515, Sean Nixon (1997) ‘Circulating Culture’ in Paul du Gay (ed) *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, pp. 177-234

³⁹⁵ David Hesmondhalgh (2006) ‘Bourdieu, the Media and Cultural Production’, *Media, Culture and Society*, 28:2, p. 226

³⁹⁶ Hesmondhalgh, ‘Bourdieu, the Media and Cultural Production’, p. 226

petite bourgeoisie' and cultural intermediaries is adopted in Nixon's examination of advertising practitioners and Negus' analysis of record industry professionals. Negus argues that *all* industry personnel function as cultural intermediaries and are thereby crucial in the meaning making process. However, as Hesmondhalgh points out, 'in Bourdieu's sense of the term it is the *critics* that act as cultural intermediaries in the record industry',³⁹⁷ [emphasis in original].

As such, I return to Bourdieu's initial definition, and Hesmondhalgh's further clarification and expansion of the term. That is, a cultural intermediary engages in 'occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services.'³⁹⁸ For Bourdieu, 'the most typical of whom are the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of "quality" newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers'.³⁹⁹ Thus the cultural intermediary is characterised as both *critic* and *expert*. This section argues that the celebrity images (as they are constructed in extra-textual discourses) can also be considered 'cultural intermediaries' insofar as they prove integral in the process of 'mediating' the symbolic value of fashion to consumers, functioning as both critic and expert.

While elements of Keith Negus and Sean Nixon's work are challenged by Hesmondhalgh, both usefully call for a more 'differentiated picture' of cultural intermediaries, 'one which is sensitive to differences aligned with educational background training, and which is aware of issues of gender and race'.⁴⁰⁰ In choosing three very different case studies, I seek to contribute to this undertaking and endeavour to illustrate how differences of race, ethnicity, gender and age crucially affect the ways in which the celebrity image functions as a cultural intermediary.

In order to do so, it is important to outline precisely how this study intersects with existing studies of stardom and celebrity, as the celebrity and fashion industry have shared a lengthy and varied relationship. Star images have long since been used to endorse various fashion and beauty products, and in so doing, they are involved in meaning making

³⁹⁷ Hesmondhalgh, 'Bourdieu, the Media and Cultural Production', p. 226

³⁹⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 359

³⁹⁹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 325

⁴⁰⁰ Negus, 'The Work of Cultural Intermediaries and the Enduring Distance between Production and Consumption', p. 511

processes - that is, mediating the symbolic value of products between producers and consumers while simultaneously benefitting from the association with particular brands. For example, Dyer's analysis of a feature article on Gloria Swanson and Chanel, in a 1932 issue of Photoplay, demonstrates the ways in which celebrity intertexts provide a space in which these meaning making processes can take place.⁴⁰¹ Drawing on Dyer, Moseley further explores how fashion and celebrity foster a reciprocal relationship. She writes:

On the one hand [fashion] is separating and defining; fashion and dress, in relation to stars, can become the supreme marker of their identity – indeed the uniqueness of their persona. It can make them special, unreachable and untouchable. At the same time, however, dress and fashion are also part of the connective tissue of the social, allowing us to make judgments – even sartorial choices – based upon our ability to read their articulations in relation to that identity.⁴⁰²

Therefore, this section also adopts this perspective and examines the ways in which fashion is used by SJP, Adam Brody and America Ferrera to facilitate their positions as both fashion experts and 'ordinary' people.

Informed by Leo Lowenthal's canonical essay 'The Triumph of Mass Idols',⁴⁰³ suggests that the star functions as an 'idol of consumption'.⁴⁰⁴ Indeed, while Lowenthal's work has been critiqued insofar as it presents the consumer as a (typically 'feminine') cultural 'dupe' who passively emulates the consumer behaviour of stars, Dyer uses Lowenthal's thesis in order to demonstrate the social significance of the star image within consumer society. He argues that the shift in the 20th century from production to consumption required stars or 'idols' to generate demand for the excess of consumer goods produced.

The function of stars within consumer society is evident in the earliest writings on fashion and film (see Eckert, and Linda Mizejewski's analysis of the Ziegfield Follies).⁴⁰⁵ Indeed, in their article 'Puffed Sleeves Before Tea-Time: Joan Crawford, Adrian and Women Audiences', Herzog and Gaines demonstrate how fashion has long since been connected to

⁴⁰¹ Dyer, Stars, p. 38

⁴⁰² Moseley, 'Introduction', p. 6

⁴⁰³ Leo Lowenthal (1961) [1994] 'The Triumph of Mass Idols', Literature, Popular Culture, and Society. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall

⁴⁰⁴ Dyer, Stars, p. 45

⁴⁰⁵ Linda Mizejewski (1999) Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema, North Carolina, Duke University Press

the construction and reception of the star persona.⁴⁰⁶ But their analysis of Joan Crawford and the ‘impact’ of the Letty Lynton dress within consumer society, offers a more positive characterisation of female fans as ‘active’ in the processes of consumption than Lowenthal’s earlier work. Ultimately, they conclude that ‘fashion worked to elicit women’s participation in star and screen myth making’.⁴⁰⁷ In other words, Herzog and Gaines’ analysis of 1930s star/fan relationships echoes Moseley’s comments cited above, which suggest that fashion facilitates the perception that the star is ‘unreachable’ yet ‘connected’ to the audience. Seeking to build upon these studies, I wish to suggest that stars and their audiences’ engagement with this meaning making process remains crucial in the contemporary period.

⁴⁰⁶ Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (1991) ‘Puffed Sleeves Before Tea-Time: Joan Crawford, Adrian and Women Audiences’ in Christine Gledhill (ed) Stardom: Industry of Desire, pp. 74-92

⁴⁰⁷ Gaines and Herzog, ‘Puffed Sleeves Before Tea-Time’, p. 87

Chapter Seven

‘Real Life Cinderella’: SJP, Class and ‘Tastemaking’

In her article, ‘In Love with Sarah Jessica Parker’, Deborah Jermyn acknowledges how Sex and the City:

has become part of the cultural fabric of everyday life, a *brand* [fans] engage in not just in relation to the TV programme they watch, but in the magazines they buy, the clothes they wear, even the drinks they order in bars ⁴⁰⁸[my emphasis].

As the above passage makes clear, SATC has achieved a zeitgeist status. The show occupies a privileged position within popular culture as an arbiter of ‘taste’, and it is held responsible for SJP’s elevation from television personality to ‘style icon’. As Jermyn notes elsewhere, SJP is ‘beyond an actress... she is a trend-setting icon and personal grooming guru, a prime aspirational figure for a contemporary ‘middle’ youth (and arguably white, middle-class) women’.⁴⁰⁹

This chapter examines how the circulation of SJP’s star image in extra-textual material is crucial in perpetuating the desire for this lifestyle offscreen. Moreover, I suggest that this function of SJP’s star image informs her position as a cultural intermediary and ‘tastemaker’. That said, it is pertinent to note here that SJP’s position as a cultural intermediary is somewhat complicated by contemporary discourses surrounding fashion and social class. In their book Channels of Desire, Stuart and Elizabeth Ewan demonstrate how fashion magazines seek to foreground the notion that ‘[t]oday there is no fashion: Only *fashions*... No rules, only choices... [and] Everyone can be anyone’ [emphasis in original].⁴¹⁰ This understanding is celebrated by some in the contemporary climate, insofar as it holds the promise of an egalitarian society, and suggests a move towards individual choice. Indeed, these claims echo postfeminist ideologies which promote consumption as a form of ‘empowerment’ for (albeit predominantly white, middle-class) women. However, this shift has also generated anxieties within academic discourse that fashion will become

⁴⁰⁸ Deborah Jermyn (2004) ‘In Love with Sarah Jessica Parker: Celebrating Female Fandom and Friendship in *Sex and the City*’ Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (eds) Reading Sex and the City, London: I.B Tauris, p. 202

⁴⁰⁹ Jermyn, ‘Bringing out the * in You’, p. 68

⁴¹⁰ Stuart Ewan and Elizabeth Ewan (1992) Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, pp. 186-187

completely meaningless and fail to function as a marker of cultural identity. These conflicting discourses, I argue, inform SJP's star image.

SJP, who 'embod[ies] a particular type of quirky but directional style, alongside a capacity for classical glamour' becomes crucial in giving fashion 'meaning'.⁴¹¹ In addition, I would argue that, SJP's image, as constructed by and circulated within celebrity and fashion magazines, invites readers to practice skills in *reading* fashion to discover this meaning. While in some ways SJP's star image seeks to promote the understanding that fashion can be 'for everyone', this chapter shall argue that her construction and circulation within celebrity and fashion magazines operates within very distinct class boundaries and ultimately privileges middle-class notions of taste.

In order to produce this account, I consult a selection of celebrity and fashion magazines - designed to address audiences with varying knowledge of fashion and cultural capital - these include, Harper's Bazaar, (which seeks to address the fashion cognoscenti) and People (designed for broader circulation).⁴¹² In so doing, I am able to draw out specific discourses of class that construct SJP's star persona as an arbiter of middleclass taste.

'A Real Life Cinderella': SJP, Stardom and Class

In her article 'Bringing out the * in you', Deborah Jermyn calls for the substantial revision and re-imagining of traditional paradigms of television fame (Ellis, Langer),⁴¹³ and demonstrates how SJP's star persona complicates the longstanding assumption that 'stardom proper' is an exclusively 'cinematic phenomenon'.⁴¹⁴ Deriving from Ellis' paradigm (outlined in the introduction), it has long since been argued that celebrity intertexts have a tendency to collapse any notion of difference between the on and offscreen personae of television actors/personalities. According to Christine Geraghty, in fictional television shows 'the actor is hidden behind the character and recognised only

⁴¹¹ Jermyn, 'Bringing out the * in You', p. 68

⁴¹² These two publications were chosen precisely because they appeal to different readerships. In addition both provide unique insights into the construction of SJP's star persona – the Harper's Bazaar issue details a specific moment in SJP's career post-SATC, during the launch of her perfume range. Moreover, unlike Vogue magazine, Harper's Bazaar has no connection with SATC and thus in some ways offers an 'unbiased' account of her relationship with the show. People magazine, was chosen over other weekly celebrity magazines because of its pervasiveness within US culture – it has a reported circulation of 3.75 million readers.

⁴¹³ See introduction for a more detailed outline of these debates

⁴¹⁴ Ellis, Visible Fictions

through that association'.⁴¹⁵ As such, the television actor is considered 'too familiar' and 'too ordinary' to possess 'real' star quality. However, Jermyn argues that SJP's television role as Carrie Bradshaw has granted her 'a level of visibility and public fascination which cinema did not while transforming her into a style icon, with all the connotations of distance that such status inescapably brings... [as such, it] both *has* and *has not* made her "familiar"'⁴¹⁶ [emphasis in original]. To return to Moseley's quote cited in the introduction to this section, it is primarily through Carrie Bradshaw's connection to fashion that SJP is able to demonstrate her 'individuality' and difference. In addition, her association with fashion also serves as the 'connective tissue' between SJP and her fans.

In *Stars*, Dyer examines the semiotic and ideological characteristics of stardom which he defines as 'an image of the way stars live'.⁴¹⁷ He writes, '[f]or the most part, this generalised lifestyle is the assumed backdrop for the specific personality of the star and the details and events of her/his life.'⁴¹⁸ As such, 'lifestyle' is often used to demonstrate the *distinctions* between stars and 'ordinary people'. Moreover, it is primarily the *display* of lifestyle (within extra-textual material) that contributes to the construction of the star as 'glamorous', and an object of desire. Indeed, for Ellis, it is the supposed lack of 'glamour' associated with television personalities which prevents them from achieving 'legitimate stardom'. Underpinning both of these assumptions then, is the notion that 'conspicuous consumption' is key in the construction of the star image – in effect it is the display of lifestyle that is crucial in making stars *mean*.

However, as detailed in the introduction, claims of 'recent' changes within both celebrity and consumer culture (often considered to be paradigmatic of postmodernity), have certain implications for the way in which meaning is thought to be created by both star and audience.⁴¹⁹ The now familiar claim that postmodern consumer culture is preoccupied with 'the domination of information, media and signs, the disaggregation of social structure into *lifestyles*, the general priority of consumption over production in everyday life and the constitution of identities and interests'⁴²⁰ [emphasis in original], suggests that previous

⁴¹⁵ Geraghty, 'Re-examining Stardom', p. 187

⁴¹⁶ Jermyn, 'Bringing out the Star in You', p. 82

⁴¹⁷ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 35

⁴¹⁸ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 35

⁴¹⁹ To reiterate, I would argue that these claims of newness are overstated. Similarly, it is also important to emphasize that specific characteristics thought to be exclusive to the 'postmodernism' can also be traced back to the modernist period and beyond.

⁴²⁰ Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, p. 193

hierarchical systems, shaped by discourses of class have become redundant. Indeed, the display of ‘lifestyle’ is the key determinant in demonstrating *difference*. This is not to suggest that lifestyle has not always been an important part of identity. Rather, the main difference is, that while lifestyles were initially considered to be ‘systematic products of the *habitus*’ [emphasis in original], postmodern thought suggests that the ‘lifestyle’ is no longer influenced by distinct class positions. Moreover, this perceived ‘new’ shift coincides with developments in celebrity culture; in particular, the suggestion that there is a contemporary fascination with the private life(style) of the celebrity.⁴²¹ Moreover, it has long since been argued that stars are intrinsically linked to notions of selfhood and identity – specifically, stars are said to ‘articulate what it is to be human in society: that is, they express the particular notion that we hold of the “individual”’.⁴²² Thus, the celebrity lifestyle has an important role in conveying the ‘meaning’ associated with material goods and the display of lifestyle, and arguably educating consumers in the practice of discrimination.

In the midst of the supposed postmodern ‘crisis’, it appears that stars must continue to participate in processes of meaning making in order to maintain the cultural meaning of fashion (and, for that matter, other consumer goods) by (re)producing distinctions which have hitherto correlated with class. It could therefore be argued that this shift has engineered a return to a more traditional model of stardom in which the star is required to ‘reinforce values under threat’.⁴²³ Within the contemporary moment, it is thought that traditional understandings of class politics and social mobility are ‘under threat’.

That said, it is important not to overstate the severity of this ‘crisis’ and bear in mind that fashion has long since fostered a complex relationship to class, insofar as it has traditionally been used to ‘blur’ social standing while simultaneously signalling social status. As Diana Crane explains, fashion allows individuals to appear to:

have more social or economic resources than was actually the case...At the same time clothing was primarily used as a means of indicating social status in the sense of claiming the status that one had attained and of reinforcing affiliations with specific social groups that dressed in a characteristic manner.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ Again, it should be reiterated that audiences have long expressed interest in the personal lives of celebrities – and that early fan magazines provided images of the celebrity ‘at home’ etc.

⁴²² Dyer, *Stars*, p. 8

⁴²³ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 25

⁴²⁴ Crane, *Fashion and It's Social Agendas*, p. 67

Therefore, it is important to note that the anxieties regarding fashion and social class in the contemporary period are not new. Rather, it appears that the contemporary period is witnessing an intensification of previous concerns. Indeed, SJP's representation in People magazine can be read as a response to these developments with regard to fashion and social class in contemporary culture. However, I propose here, that the construction of her star image remains couched within discourses of class. As such, the supposed move to a 'classless society' in which fashion is for everyone appears to be somewhat overstated. That said, within the material surveyed here, there is evidence to suggest that an attempt is made to equip readers with a more 'sophisticated' understanding of the value of fashion and its relationship to the feminine identity.

The construction of SJP's image within People signals a return to more traditional narratives of fame in order to signify *difference* and *sameness* between SJP and 'ordinary people'. In particular, Dyer's concept of the 'success myth'⁴²⁵ is frequently employed in the discursive construction of her image. According to Dyer, the success myth draws from the concept of the 'American Dream' and pivots on several (somewhat contradictory) discourses; that 'talent', 'specialness', 'hard work' and 'professionalism' will undoubtedly be rewarded, while simultaneously promoting the understanding that 'lucky breaks' can happen to anyone.⁴²⁶ With regard to SJP, the 'success myth' is recast as a 'Cinderella' motif, which as Moseley reminds us, is buttressed by concepts of social mobility and social class. As such, SJP's image not only pivots on the understanding that hard work and talent can be converted into success, but also the notion that physical appearance and dress can be a key determinant in this process. The Cinderella motif, with its emphasis on the 'intersection of clothes, style, power and status',⁴²⁷ further reinforces the importance of fashion with regard to SJP's star image, and becomes the central explanation of her fame within People magazine.

In an October 2000 issue of People, SJP's image appears next to the headline: 'Sarah Jessica Parker: Real Life Cinderella'. Below, the tagline reads: '[f]rom a hardscrabble Ohio childhood to fame, a great marriage and *Sex and the City*'.

⁴²⁵ Dyer, Stars, p. 48

⁴²⁶ Dyer, Stars, p. 48

⁴²⁷ Moseley, 'Dress, Class and Audrey Hepburn: The Significance of the Cinderella Story', p. 109

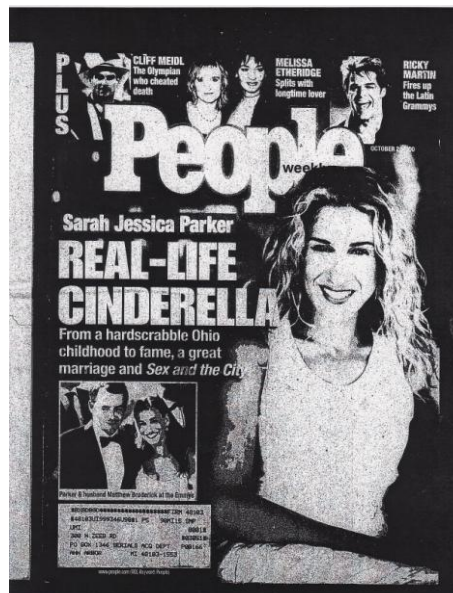


Figure 1: SJP, *People*

This issue frames SJP's stardom within a narrative which celebrates her apparently meritocratic rise to fame. SJP's celebrity status can be characterised as 'achieved celebrity' by Chris Rojek's definition, as it 'derives from the perceived accomplishments of the individual'.⁴²⁸ The emphasis on a difficult childhood and an initial lack of pedigree and economic capital suggests that SJP had to 'work' for her success. Moreover, the significance of class mobility is foregrounded within the main article. The opening paragraph details SJP's experiences at the 2000 Emmy awards and reflects this:

Not one to let a little thing like not taking home her own Emmy ruffle her feathers, the diminutive actress is fixating instead on the pink plumage of her Oscar de la Renta gown. 'Did you get a shot of this dress?' She asks photographers, spinning round to make her skirt twirl. 'This is my first experience with real couture! Each feather was sewn on one at a time!' One should forgive Parker for sounding like a giddy Cinderella, but if the glass slipper - or the Jimmy Choo sandal - fits...⁴²⁹

As the above passage makes clear, SJP's success is articulated through dress – specifically through the 'conspicuous consumption' of 'real couture'. In addition, SJP's notable excitement evidences Dyer's claim that '[t]he myth of success...suggests that success is worth having – in the form of conspicuous consumption'.⁴³⁰ Here, SJP displays her wealth and social mobility through fashion and endeavours to foreground the value of couture. For example, she explicitly describes the labour involved in the garment's production, thereby signalling its difference from mass produced high street fashion. As such, SJP perpetuates

⁴²⁸ Chris Rojek (2001) *Celebrity*, London: Reaktion Books, p. 18

⁴²⁹ Anon (October 2nd 2000) 'Naughty but Nice', *People*, p. 118

⁴³⁰ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 42

the notion that, despite developments with regard to the ‘democratisation’ of fashion and taste, couture continues to occupy an important position within ‘legitimate’ culture.

Despite the pejorative connotations associated with conspicuous consumption (i.e. that it is ‘wasteful’, ‘vulgar’ and ‘unnecessary’) SJP maintains a humility which allows her to traverse the boundaries between ‘acceptable’ and ‘excessive’ consumption, with no negative repercussions. For example, the same article goes on to describe other trappings of fame, to which SJP now has access (these include a ‘closet full’ of Manolo Blahnik’s and two Fendi Baguettes). Yet rather than presenting SJP as ‘spoiled’ or ‘undeserving’ the article is keen to remind readers of Parker’s deprived childhood. One paragraph in particular, is especially revealing and is thus worth quoting in full:

Yet even on Madison Avenue, memories of her ‘Dickensian’ childhood, as Parker once called it, are never distant. On a recent shopping trip, recalls the *Sex and the City* first assistant director Bettianne Fishman; “she saw something she liked and she stopped and said ‘Oh a little pricey’. I asked, ‘Why did that even come into your head?’ And she said, ‘Well, you know what, let me take it and if it doesn’t work I can always return it.’ ‘She doesn’t forget.’⁴³¹

I wish to draw two interrelated points from this passage. First, the deliberate use of the term ‘Dickensian’ dispels any depreciatory associations with the working classes which, it has been argued, suggests a lack of cultural capital and ‘respectability’. For as Beverley Skeggs notes in her book *Formations of Class and Gender*, the working class woman has long since been associated with ‘immoral’ and ‘improper’ sexual behaviour.⁴³² Therefore, the term ‘Dickensian’ suggests a more wholesome image, since it is traditionally associated with Victorian Britain, and therefore connects Parker to a specific set of values which pivot on sexual propriety and hard work. Second, Fishman’s anecdote regarding her recent shopping trip with Parker characterises SJP as a ‘responsible consumer’. While it is clear she that she can afford luxury goods, she carefully considers the value of the item. Both the reference to her ‘Dickensian’ upbringing, and the exchange between Parker and Fishman demonstrate Parker’s ability to exercise ‘restraint’. This ‘restraint’ is key in the construction of her star persona, insofar as it signals *difference* between her onscreen persona who (as discussed in Chapter Four) was characterised as an ‘irresponsible’ consumer. That said, there are parallels which between SJP and Carrie which are fostered in the *People* article. For instance, while Carrie is characterised as an ‘irresponsible

⁴³¹ Anon, ‘Naughty but Nice’, p. 118

⁴³² Beverley Skeggs (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender*, London: Sage, p. 3

consumer', she is also the bearer of cultural and intellectual capital – this is conveyed through her profession as a writer (and from season four onwards her position as a writer/cultural intermediary for Vogue). As such, her difference and sameness to Carrie becomes crucial in communicating SJP's class and 'taste' disposition.

'Access to the Canons of Taste': SJP and 'Style Watch'

Informed by Veblen's well known work on consumerism, Dyer demonstrates how stars also participate in a version of conspicuous consumption.⁴³³ In so doing, stars do not only demonstrate their wealth, but also their 'access to the canons of taste'.⁴³⁴ The two passages cited above also demonstrate SJP's knowledge and expertise in fashion. In the first quote, she demonstrates knowledge of the production practices and appreciation of the value of *haute couture* – she possesses the 'aesthetic gaze'. In the second, she demonstrates an ability to make judgements on 'legitimate' culture. In so doing, SJP justifies her status as a fashion icon. This aspect of her persona is foregrounded in People magazine, in the weekly 'Style Watch' feature. Between 1998 and 2004, SJP appears regularly in the 'Style Watch' section. The section, usually consisting of 1-3 pages, reports on a specific fashion trend adopted by a range of celebrities. The celebrities featured in 'Style Watch', and People more generally, have achieved fame in varying and often multiple media platforms. As such, the magazine refuses to acknowledge hierarchies of fame which circulate in academic discourse (i.e., film stardom as legitimised above television fame). However, the magazine perpetuates more traditional attitudes towards fashion and continues to support traditional hierarchies which privilege luxury designer fashion over industrial or street style.

The feature is presented as an 'insider' look at, not only celebrity fashion choices, but also the 'private' and 'real' life of celebrities themselves. That said, the images used tend to foreground the 'glamorous' and 'extraordinary' lifestyles of the celebrities. SJP, for example, is mostly photographed (albeit rarely in posed shots) at award ceremonies and benefits in and around New York City. Moreover, these 'real life' moments would not seem out of place within the fictional setting of SATC and, at the very least, continue to promote the luxurious lifestyle associated with the show. As such, SJP's extra-textual circulation continues to foster her connection to her onscreen counterpart and the show

⁴³³ Dyer, Stars, p. 38

⁴³⁴ Dyer, Stars, p. 42

itself. The images of SJP at various events also serve to reinforce her connection to legitimate culture, and demonstrate her cultural capital. For example, SJP is often pictured at the theatre and charity benefits. Moreover, in a 2003 'Style Watch', SJP is pictured at the New York Public Library for the 'Council of Fashion Designers of America Gala' – an event which she also hosted.⁴³⁵

In addition, it is pertinent to note here that the images used within the feature and the accompanying articles present celebrities as the 'dictators' of fashion. In her article 'Sharon Stone in a Gap Turtleneck', Epstein traces the evolution of the Hollywood star (from classical Hollywood to the late 1990s) and suggests that recent shifts in celebrity culture have, in effect, repositioned 'the popular actress from a *dictator* of fashion trends to a consumer of the public's "wears"' ⁴³⁶ [my emphasis]. Similarly, Julie Wilson introduces the concept of 'star testing' in order to account for the ways in which celebrity magazines encourage readers to *evaluate*, as opposed to identify with celebrity images.

Both Wilson and Epstein suggest that the increasing prevalence of features such as 'best and worst dressed lists' and 'red carpet features' in celebrity magazines invite readers to make judgements on the fashion choices of the celebrity. Even, as Wilson points out, regular features such as Us Weekly's 'Stars: They're just like us' sections are 'structured in a way that promotes the quick evaluation of celebrity lifestyle and the day-to-day activity captured by the paparazzi'.⁴³⁷ However, I propose that the representation of SJP (and the other case studies examined in this chapter) complicate this notion of a shift, insofar as they are positioned primarily as fashion 'icons' and ultimately, People recognises and celebrates *haute couture* as 'legitimate' culture. This of course, is not to suggest that evaluative judgements are not made by readers, for it has long since been argued that 'ordinary women' appropriate fashion and engage in creating and subverting fashion trends.⁴³⁸

However, rather than offering a critique, the 'Style Watch' section is for the most part celebratory, and can be seen to perform an 'educative' function; teaching readers about fashion practices and trends. The celebrity image is used in the 'Style Watch' feature to

⁴³⁵ Anon (16th June 2003), 'Gown Town: Style Watch', People, p. 135

⁴³⁶ Epstein, 'Sharon Stone in a Gap Turtleneck', p. 207

⁴³⁷ Julie Wilson (2010) 'Star Testing: The Emerging Politics of Celebrity Gossip' The Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film and Television 65, p. 32

⁴³⁸ See Partington, 'Popular Fashion and Working-Class Affluence'

communicate the ‘symbolic value’ of fashion to ‘ordinary’ readers. In particular, SJP’s image is used to promote, and to some extent police, ‘appropriate’ models of femininity. In a June 1998 edition of People, SJP appears in ‘Style Watch’ promoting crinoline petticoats and ball gowns. The article reads ‘[n]ot since the cinematic debut of Scarlett O’Hara has Hollywood been so crazy for crinolines. In fact, with the recent return of ball gowns even the most body-conscious celebs are swapping bare midriffs for bodices and plunging necklines for pour skirts’.⁴³⁹ The design described in the passage above is reminiscent of Dior’s ‘new look’ and as such is connected to a very specific version of ‘refined’, ‘respectable’ domestic femininity (associated with the 1950s). This, of course, is underscored by the insinuation that previous celebrity fashion trends had bordered on the ‘inappropriate’ as they presented an overtly sexual femininity (the mention of ‘bare midriffs’ and ‘plunging’ necklines suggests an excess of uncovered flesh on display).

Beside the main article, SJP is quoted as saying: ‘One of the best things about being a woman is that we get to look like women’.⁴⁴⁰ The accompanying image of SJP wearing a vintage Comme des Garçons (which ironically translates as ‘like boys’) gown, appears to the left of the main text. SJP’s accompanying quote very decidedly positions her as celebratory of the ‘feminine’ aesthetic of the ball gown and arguably of this particular visual representation of femininity. Moreover, the comment reminds us of the ‘feminine’ pleasures of engaging in fashion practices, which as I suggest in Chapter Four, is central to the representation of fashion in SATC. In acknowledging the feminine pleasure of fashion, SJP serves to increase the symbolic value of fashion insofar as the gown no longer functions simply as clothing, but becomes a tool through which feminine identities can be constructed, performed and shared (which is coded here as a pleasurable experience). In this respect, fashion is presented as accessible for *every* woman. Parker’s comments suggest that all women have the capacity to participate in fashion, however the accompanying image of her in couture reinforces economic boundaries which complicate this assumption.

‘Fashion for Everyone’: Maintaining Class Boundaries

SJP’s understanding that fashion should be for ‘everyone’ became central to her star image in 2007 when she launched her first clothing line: ‘Bitten’. The low price clothing line,

⁴³⁹ Anon (29th June 1998) ‘Full Circle: Style Watch’, People, p. 114

⁴⁴⁰ Sarah Jessica Parker cited in ‘Full Circle: Style Watch’, p. 114

designed by SJP was developed in order to allow women access to ‘quality’ affordable clothing (no item is over \$100). In an interview in a June 2007 ‘Style Watch’ feature, SJP claimed ‘[t]his line is really about a philosophy - clothing for people in every economic bracket’⁴⁴¹ Similarly, the Bitten Clothes motto is that ‘it is every women's absolute right to have a pulled-together fashionable, positive wardrobe with money left over to live.’⁴⁴² In an interview which featured on the website, SJP specifically recalls her own childhood and lack of disposable income, explaining that watching her mother attempt to make eight children ‘presentable’ on a budget influenced the concept for ‘quality’, yet affordable clothing. She asserts:

I really loved the idea of making designer fashion accessible to every woman in this country despite the size of her bank account, despite her size, her shape and her ethnic background... The idea of liberating women with the democratization of fashion is extremely appealing to me.⁴⁴³

Moreover, this speaks to the postfeminist ideology of the female as an ‘empowered consumer’ and assumes that consumption plays an important role as a ‘strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of self’.⁴⁴⁴ Therefore, while SJP seeks to offer an ‘inclusive’ approach to fashion, this preoccupation has a distinct white middle class address. Indeed, as Tasker and Negra argue, postfeminism is ‘white and middle class by default’.⁴⁴⁵ Of course, the same critique has been levelled at SATC.⁴⁴⁶

The ‘Cinderella’ motif is played out within the promotional material for this line. As the web interview makes clear, while it was her family’s financial struggles which inspired SJP, it was her acquired cultural capital and social mobility that afforded her the opportunity to create the line. Indeed, by the time of Bitten’s launch, SJP’s association with SATC had confirmed her position as a fashion icon, and thus contributed to her cultural capital. Therefore, it could be argued that she is now associated with the typically ‘masculine’ sphere of production as well as consumption. Indeed, this further legitimates her position as a ‘tastemaker’ insofar as she (as the designer) is responsible for producing

⁴⁴¹ Sarah Jessica Parker (4th June 2007) cited in ‘Style Watch’, People <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20061073,00.html> (last accessed 16/5/10)

⁴⁴² Sarah Jessica Parker cited in ‘Sarah Jessica Parker Bitten Clothes Line’, <http://www.usfreeads.com/1350202-cla.html> (last accessed 16/5/10)

⁴⁴³ Sarah Jessica Parker, ‘Sarah Jessica Parker Bitten Clothes Line’, <http://www.usfreeads.com/1350202-cla.html> (last accessed 16/5/10)

⁴⁴⁴ Tasker and Negra, Interrogating Postfeminism, p. 2

⁴⁴⁵ Tasker and Negra, Interrogating Postfeminism, p. 2

⁴⁴⁶ See Jermyn, Sex and the City, p. 89

the symbolic value of fashion. In addition, this symbolic value is increased because of her position as a star insofar as the clothes become the ‘connective’ tissue between SJP and her fans. Moreover, the affordability of the line suggests that SJP seeks to offer fans the opportunity to become responsible consumers. In addition, the marketing surrounding the clothing line seeks to perpetuate the notion that engaging in fashion practices is a ‘feminine’ pleasure which women of all class fractions can enjoy.

The designs, described by Parker as ‘classic’ and ‘simple’, demonstrate the preoccupation with ‘respectability’ evident in the ‘Style Watch’ pages and therefore, continue to foreground class discourses which contribute to the construction of SJP’s cultural identity. Moreover, they demonstrate a ‘middle class’ notion of ‘refined’ taste. Therefore, while SJP appears to outwardly celebrate the postmodern preoccupation with ‘fashion for everyone’ and individual choice, it is clear that these discourses remain closely connected to and couched within more traditional discourses of taste and class. Moreover, it is important to note that SJP’s association with couture remains central to the construction of her star persona, in order to maintain her position as a fashion icon.

‘Why Don’t You... [be Respectable]?’ Lifestyle, Class and Cultural Intermediaries

In 2009, SJP appeared on the cover of high-end fashion magazine Harper’s Bazaar. The feature article and accompanying photo-shoot provide a useful lens through which to examine SJP’s star image post-SATC and gives a sense of the competing discourses which surround her public persona. The article, which is positioned as a promotional piece for the launch of her fragrances, continues to foreground SJP as an advocate for the ‘democratisation’ of fashion and in a very revealing anecdote, SJP promotes the myth that ‘everyone can be anyone’. It reads:

It is fascinating, the fantasy that swirls around Sarah Jessica Parker. Few can resist its pull. Exhibit A: the scene in the MTV documentary on Britney Spears in which Britney is trying on a mini sweaterdress. She and her assistant agree that said outfit is very SJP. ‘[But] you’re Britney Spears,’ the assistant says. “You’re not Sarah Jessica Parker.” ‘I can be her for a day,’ Britney replies. ‘I heard about that,’ Sarah Jessica says, clearly still computing. ‘God bless her. She can be whoever she wants to be for a day. We all can!’⁴⁴⁷

Indeed, these comments are inescapably bound up with class politics. Britney Spears, characterised within contemporary media culture as ‘white trash’, *aspires* to ‘be’ SJP.

⁴⁴⁷ Laura Brown (March 2009) ‘Why Don’t You...?’, Harper’s Bazaar, p374

Here, SJP symbolises a notion of respectable middle-classness, despite the fact that her impoverished roots are well-documented in other celebrity intertexts (see People above). Thus, there is a distinction created between the kind of working class femininity Spears continues to embody (despite her wealth), and the kind of respectable, humble working class identity characterised by Parker. This distinction is crucial to Parker's role as a style icon and cultural intermediary for middleclass women, insofar as her cultural capital, and her suitability for the role, could otherwise be called into question. Moreover, it is important to note that Parker demonstrates a loyalty to her working class roots, which is parlayed into a sense of social responsibility. For example, directly following the above passage, SJP comments on her relationship with 'ordinary women; she claims' I'm flattered by the connection with women...almost everything I do outside of work, I want to do it for them.'⁴⁴⁸ Indeed, the complex discourses regarding Parker's loyalty to her working class roots, and her access to the privileges she enjoys as a result of her established, and *deserved*, star status, are negotiated throughout the article. Consequently, this speaks to the ways in which female fans are encouraged to identify with her. Whilst the invocation of an 'impoverished' background (and thus the currency of the success myth) is common to many star/ celebrity constructions, what I am suggesting here is that SJP's image also balances this with a distinctly middle-class address, and that this is particularly apparent in the Harper's Bazaar feature.

In addition, the above passage clearly speaks to more traditional notions of star 'identification' practices. Indeed, SJP's cultural resonance with female fans is in some ways magnified here insofar as the 'fan' in this case is Britney Spears (a celebrity in her own right) and thus demonstrates the wide reach of Parker's 'star power'. However, despite Parker's claim that Spears 'can be whoever she wants to be', a counter discourse also circulates here which clearly demonstrates the *difference* between fans and SJP. For example, the opening paragraph describes SJP as 'the glamorous everywoman... She is someone who, if we had a bigger shoe budget, we *think* we could all be'⁴⁴⁹[my emphasis]. As this quote makes clear, fashion allows for a connection to be made between fans and SJP, however Parker's abundant economic capital becomes central in maintaining this notion of difference. As with the 'Style Watch' section, SJP's wealth is signalled through 'conspicuous consumption, and continues to demonstrate that success is 'worth having.'

⁴⁴⁸ Parker in Brown, 'Why Don't You...?', p. 374

⁴⁴⁹ Brown 'Why Don't You...?', p. 374

That said, SJP's cultural capital is also continually referenced, and used to legitimate her position as a cultural intermediary. For example, the second half of the article consists of a photo-shoot in which SJP 'paid homage' to Diana Vreeland (who was also famously referred to by her initials DV) – 'fashion icon' and editor of Harper's Bazaar between 1936-1962, most famous for her 'Why don't you...?' column which offered fashion and lifestyle advice to readers. Vreeland fulfilled a function as a cultural intermediary in the most traditional sense – she allowed access to 'legitimate' culture (primarily *haute couture*) and sought to teach readers skills in fashion and consumption practices. The remainder of the article seeks to draw parallels between SJP and Vreeland. The similarities between the pair are, for the most part, connected to fashion, taste and class. For example, the article reveals that 'DV, like SJP, was fond of the word, *vulgar*'⁴⁵⁰[emphasis in original]. There are of course clear class connotations evident in this observation. Moreover, SJP's response is equally situated within discourses of class. She claims 'We might connect over that, over people's vulgarity, and how much we see it. It's a very good word vulgar.'⁴⁵¹

Not only is the exchange demonstrating SJP's 'educational' capital – displayed via her sophisticated vocabulary but also the term itself carries strong class connotations insofar as the terms describes a 'lacking [of] sophistication or *good taste*'[my emphasis].⁴⁵² Therefore, SJP aligns herself with Vreeland as an arbiter of taste, and demonstrates her ability to decide what is and what is not 'vulgar'. In other words, SJP and Vreeland have access to the 'canons of good taste'.⁴⁵³ In addition, the term vulgar is also considered 'a characteristic of or belonging to *ordinary* people'⁴⁵⁴[my emphasis]. This reinforces this notion of *difference* which is vital not only in terms star/fan relationships, but also again signifies a difference in 'class' and 'capital'.

Moreover, the following paragraph implies that the pair both possesses the 'aesthetic disposition':

'she [DV] really created a completely different way of thinking about aesthetics, living, and indulgence,' she [SJP] says earnestly, 'and the feeling of fashion.'.. The

⁴⁵⁰ Brown 'Why Don't You...?', p. 374

⁴⁵¹ Brown 'Why Don't You...?', p. 374

⁴⁵² Oxford English Dictionary (2004, 11th Edition), p. 1621

⁴⁵³ Dyer, Stars, p. 38

⁴⁵⁴ Oxford English Dictionary (2004, 11th Edition), p. 1621

feeling of fashion is something Sarah Jessica understands implicitly...She'll readily acknowledge the transcendent power of a dress.⁴⁵⁵

Here, SJP affirms Vreeland's position as a mediator of taste demonstrating that she possessed the competences necessary for appreciating 'form over function'.⁴⁵⁶ The comments of the Harper's Bazaar journalist then, seek to remind readers of the similarities between the pair – implying that SJP also understands the 'symbolic' value of fashion 'implicitly'. In addition, the final sentence of the above passage also makes a connection between dress and social mobility insofar as it is claimed that fashion has a 'transcendental power'. This, of course, speaks to the core of the 'Cinderella' motif which features strongly in the construction of SJP's star image in People magazine.

The parallels drawn between SJP and Vreeland are most explicit in the accompanying photo-shoot in which SJP recreates famous images of Vreeland - which of course, speaks to her assertion that 'anyone can be anyone for a day'.



Figure 2: Diana Vreeland, Harper's Bazaar



Figure 3: SJP, Harper's Bazaar

The artistic images not only seek to demonstrate the 'quality' of the magazine, but associate fashion, and SJP, with legitimate culture. That said, the images also function as advertising, insofar as details of the clothing worn are printed below the image (for

⁴⁵⁵ Brown 'Why Don't You...?', p. 378

⁴⁵⁶ Bourdieu, Distinction, p. 30

example, in the above image SJP wears \$1600 blouse from Yves Saint Laurent and a \$3000 bracelet).

The first image in the series recreates DV's famous 'garden room'. It depicts SJP in a red Salvatore Ferragamo gown (made to order) lying on a chaise longue next to the tagline 'The Red Queen'.⁴⁵⁷ The garden room is covered in red and gold patterned fabric, which also covers the chaise longue. Large oil paintings and decorative lighting features adorn the walls. The image therefore connotes luxury and 'conspicuous consumption'. In addition SJP's pose, lying on the chaise longue indicates that she is a lady of 'leisure'.



Figure 4: Diana Vreeland



Figure 5: SJP, Harper's Bazaar

In contrast, the following image depicts SJP 'at work'. She is dressing/styling a mannequin in couture in a museum (which is a direct reference to Vreeland's later career when she became a consultant to the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1971). Parker is dressed in a 1970s inspired outfit consisting of a rust coloured Missoni tunic and trouser set (\$5880) and appears next to a rack of couture clothing. The mannequins are also dressed in vintage couture. The overall colour palette is starkly contrasted to the earlier image – the background is much sparser – the walls are a plain, dull sage colour and the garments on the mannequins are monochromatic. However, the image clearly seeks to signal luxury; the garments for example, although muted shades, are very detailed (with hand sewn ruffles, feathers and sequins) and use expensive fabrics (silk and fur), which suggest quality.

⁴⁵⁷ Brown 'Why Don't You...?', p. 373

This image in particular seeks to affirm SJP's status as a fashion icon and cultural intermediary. As discussed above, SJP appears 'at work, insofar as she is involved in the 'creative' labour of selecting and constructing outfits. She is, therefore, crucial in the 'presentation' of 'legitimate' culture and 'tastemaking'. While this labour is distinctly coded as 'feminine', she nonetheless demonstrates her access to 'legitimate' culture and cultural competences in fashion practices. Moreover, the location of the museum is not only crucial in signalling 'legitimate' culture, but it also foregrounds the aesthetic function of the garments, implying that fashion can be considered as a piece of 'art'. Indeed, the fact that SJP is dressing mannequins as opposed to individuals suggests that fashion carries symbolic meaning when it is not functioning as dress. Similarly, the final photograph featured in the series, depicts SJP undertaking 'intellectual' labour. The image recreates Diana Vreeland's office at Harper's Bazaar, with SJP seated on the desk surrounded by photographs of models – presumably to be used in a fashion spread within the magazine. Here, SJP adopts the role of fashion editor, which again requires a specific set of cultural competences in fashion practices and the ability to decide what is, and what is not, 'good taste'. In terms of aesthetics and composition the image also contrasts the first in the series insofar as no colour is used. The image is black and white and invokes an aesthetic of vintage, high quality, photography. As such, SJP is associated with more traditional notions of timeless elegance. It is also important to note that this final image of SJP features next to a 'Why Don't You...?' column penned by SJP. Therefore, it is not simply the image which confirms SJP's position as a cultural intermediary, but also the accompanying written article which serves as 'evidence' of her cultural competences and taste-making abilities.

The 'Why Don't You...?' column is not specifically related to fashion practices but general 'lifestyle' tips – the tagline reads: 'Sarah Jessica Parker shares her tips for a chic and gracious life'.⁴⁵⁸ For the most part, SJP's advice relates to feminine practices and in some cases seeks to police femininity/femininities. Several of the tips refer to diet, exercise and activities which position the 'self as project'.⁴⁵⁹ For example, she suggests that one should 'walk more', keep a bucket filled with low calorie candy to 'scratch the itch' (i.e.

⁴⁵⁸ Brown 'Why Don't You...?', p. 380

⁴⁵⁹ The 'self as project' is considered to be central to contemporary 'postfeminist' models of identity. See Tasker and Negra, 'Introduction', p. 20

stave off hunger) and ‘get eight hours sleep’.⁴⁶⁰ Similarly, she encourages readers to cook and bake from scratch, in order to boost self confidence. The remaining tips seek to teach readers how to gain educational and cultural capital. She suggests that individual should use the library – thereby implying the value of knowledge. Similarly, she suggests that one should ‘read the editorial page of your local paper’.⁴⁶¹ She claims ‘[i]t introduces you to opinion and can be terrifically provocative and perhaps a great motivational force for you to get involved in your community, regardless of your political ideology’.⁴⁶² This passage speaks to SJP’s loyalty to her working class background insofar as the ‘tips’ above apply to *all* individuals regardless of economic status; rather the ‘tips’ are designed to encourage self improvement within both the lower and middle classes through the acquisition of cultural and educational capital. Not only then, does the article seek to demonstrate SJP’s capital and affirm her status as the bearer of legitimate taste, but also, I would argue, makes a clear assumption about the readership/ fan base of SJP. That is, the reader is characterised as female and, either middle class, or as *aspiring* to achieve social mobility. The final tip, in particular communicates notions of appropriate, ‘respectable’ middle class behaviour insofar as it invites readers to perform citizenly duties (i.e. give spare change to charities). Moreover, this preoccupation with the ‘self as project’ is equally bound up with notions of middle-class respectability and speaks to a decidedly feminine audience. Thus, within the material surveyed here, it is clear that class discourses continue to pervade contemporary consumer culture and the concept of a ‘postmodern self’ which resists traditional power structures is flawed.

SJP’s representation in Harper’s Bazaar demonstrates precisely how important her role as a cultural intermediary has become to the construction of her star persona. Moreover, it also proves a useful lens through which to examine the social significance of her star image. If read in the context of the postmodern assumption that society is moving toward a classless society it is possible, within the material surveyed here, to trace the precise ways in which SJP’s star persona is constructed in relation to, and offers a ‘solution’ for, the problems this apparent shift may pose.

Her role as Carrie Bradshaw is equally important in offsetting these concerns. As I have demonstrated above, SJP’s star persona pivots on notions of class and social mobility. As

⁴⁶⁰ Brown ‘Why Don’t You...?’, p. 380

⁴⁶¹ Brown ‘Why Don’t You...?’, p. 380

⁴⁶² Brown ‘Why Don’t You...?’, p. 380

such, SJP is able to reinforce boundaries of ‘taste’, promoting a decidedly middle-class notion of appropriate feminine identity. However, it is equally important for SJP to perpetuate her own individuality and difference. It is precisely her associations with Carrie Bradshaw that allow SJP to cultivate an identity which, while preoccupied with class discourses, remains individual. Not only does this individuality contribute to the mythologisation of her star persona, but it also has a social significance. While, as previously discussed, the move toward a classless society promises ‘individual choice’, the emergence of ‘lifestyle’ media – such as the fashion magazines discussed by the Ewans’ and lifestyle television, has resulted in what David Bell and Joanne Hollows have termed an ‘over-democratization of taste’.⁴⁶³ In their book Ordinary Lifestyles: Popular Media, Consumption and Taste, Bell and Hollows note that ‘the over-democratization of taste... [has resulted] in a lifestyled sameness, radically devaluing the cultural capital that has been so carefully cultivated.’⁴⁶⁴

SJP’s function as a cultural intermediary thus relies on her individuality and personal style to prevent this ‘sameness’ and devaluation of fashion. However, her star image is also used to simultaneously reinforce class boundaries. While she promotes the assumption that fashion can be for everyone, her construction within Harper’s Bazaar addresses a decidedly middle-class audience. It is this particular subsection of society which, I would argue, are in the privileged position to be educated in processes of discrimination. Both of these discourses must remain in play in order for fashion to have social and cultural meaning. As such, her star persona and the celebrity intertext within which it is constructed are informed by complex and contradictory discourses regarding fashion and social class. As a result, readers/consumers of celebrity culture, I would argue, are encouraged to develop increasingly sophisticated consumer competences which allow them to *read* fashion as showcased within programming and celebrity culture. Indeed, the following chapter continues to explore the role of celebrity intertexts in the education of potential consumers with regard to Adam Brody and similarly argues that the skills offered to consumers can be used in order for consumers to engage in their own fashion practices and construct their own cultural identity in the contemporary climate.

⁴⁶³ David Bell and Joanne Hollows (2005) ‘Making Sense of Ordinary Lifestyles’ in David Bell & Joanne Hollows (eds) Ordinary Lifestyles: Popular Media, Consumption and Taste, Maidenhead: Open University Press p. 12

⁴⁶⁴ Bell and Hollows, ‘Making Sense of Ordinary Lifestyles’, p. 12

Chapter Eight

‘Man of Style’: Adam Brody, Masculinity and Fashion

Entertainment Weekly online recently posted a list of ‘50 pop culture moments that rocked fashion’ in which ‘Seth Cohen’s Geek Chic’ was positioned at number 47. Adam Brody’s onscreen character is credited with ‘[u]shering in the age of the Penguin-attired nerd’.⁴⁶⁵ As such, the press have acknowledged Brody as the ‘poster boy for Geek Chic’.⁴⁶⁶ As the Entertainment Weekly poll makes clear, Brody achieves fashion icon status precisely because he is able to bring youth ‘subcultural’ styles (typically coded as masculine) into the (feminine) mainstream.

To be sure, it is not uncommon for subcultural styles to shift into the mainstream; indeed, it is almost expected. As Crane demonstrates in her examination of men’s clothing, ‘[m]embers of youth subcultures produce styles that are eventually assimilated by “consumer” fashion, appropriating icons from media culture and engaging in various forms of fantasy, aesthetic expression and bricolage.’⁴⁶⁷ Brody then, occupies the position of an ‘icon from media culture’, crucial to this process of assimilation. In some ways, Brody can be categorized as a ‘sophisticated poacher’ which, as Crane explains, refers to those men ‘who attempt to extend the normative boundaries of acceptable male attire’.⁴⁶⁸ Brody ‘raids’ elements of subculture and appropriates them as mainstream style. This role has implications for Brody’s star image, and its use-value in celebrity and fashion intertexts. In particular, issues of gender and cultural value are key here, for, as demonstrated in section two, male fashion practices are often characterised as more ‘active’ (and thus ‘legitimate’).

This chapter argues that Brody’s connection to the ‘feminine’ world of fashion is positioned as a problem within his extra-textual circulation – particularly, his representation in men’s magazines. However, his position as a ‘subcultural’ style icon allows him to negotiate a position within the ‘feminine’ world of fashion and simultaneously maintain a hetero-masculine identity. Yet, I also wish to suggest that in order to maintain this ‘fluid’, yet normative identity Brody must maintain a level of

⁴⁶⁵ Anon, ‘50 Pop- Culture Moments That Rocked Fashion’, http://www.ew.com/ew/gallery/0,,20207076_20207079_20213500_3,00.html (last accessed 30/04/10)

⁴⁶⁶ Anon, (May 2007) ‘Man of Style’, *InStyle*, p. 185

⁴⁶⁷ Crane, *Fashion and it’s Social Agenda*, p. 172

⁴⁶⁸ Crane, *Fashion and it’s Social Agenda*, p. 173

‘subcultural’ capital in order to protect the cultural value of his star image. This, as I demonstrate, involves the apparent rejection of ‘feminine’ culture.

Using a selection of celebrity and fashion texts which are each aimed at a specific demographic; *Teen Vogue* (female teenagers), *GQ* (‘college educated’ males aged approximately 25-54),⁴⁶⁹ and *Nylon Guys* magazine (young adult, ‘urban’ males),⁴⁷⁰ this chapter examines the construction and circulation of Brody’s image as a *male* fashion icon, and ‘sophisticated poacher’. Given that the majority of male fashion icons have traditionally emerged from the more ‘masculine’ and thus ‘legitimate’ fields of music, sport or film, as a television actor, teen icon and ‘rising star’ Brody proves a useful, yet complex case study. Moreover, it is often claimed that television is an inherently ‘feminized/feminizing’⁴⁷¹ medium and this, I would argue, has informed Brody’s fashion icon status insofar as, at times, he embodies a ‘feminised’ version of masculinity (particularly within teen magazines, as demonstrated below).

To be sure, his representation in men’s magazines marks a departure from this more ‘feminised’ star image, offering instead a distinctly hetero-normative version of masculinity. This of course, is to some extent expected, given that the star image is by nature, incoherent and paradoxical. As such, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the ways in which these contradictory discourses of masculinity inform Brody’s position as a cultural intermediary.

Consuming Masculinity: The Dandy, The New Man and The Metrosexual

A body of work on masculinity and fashion cites the 1980s as an important period in which developments within consumer culture and the fashion industry resulted in increasing media/cultural attention to the male body. Often termed ‘The New Man’, a particular incarnation of masculinity was privileged over others: that which sought to challenge the myth that ‘women were fashionable and men were not’.⁴⁷² Writing in the late 1990s, Tim Edwards suggests that the ‘new man arose as a primarily media-driven phenomenon in the 1980s’.⁴⁷³ Characterised by an interest in fashion and self-presentation,

⁴⁶⁹ Anon, ‘GQ Mission Statement’, <http://www.condenastmediakit.com/gq/circulation.cfm> (accessed 20/5/10)

⁴⁷⁰ The title derives from the magazine’s focus on the cities New York and London.

⁴⁷¹ Jermyn, ‘Bringing Out the * in You’, p. 80

⁴⁷² Tim Edwards (1997) *Men in the Mirror: Men’s Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society*, Virginia: Cassell, p. 39

⁴⁷³ Edwards, *Men in the Mirror*, p. 39

the New Man' was either interpreted as at best 'more caring, nurturing and sensitive' than the 'Old Man of the 1970s' and at worst as 'more narcissistic, passive and introspective'.⁴⁷⁴ Nevertheless, it is thought that 'the new man's' continual appearance in popular media, resulted in a greater acceptance of men as consumers of fashion. In particular, Edwards argues that the emergence of men's magazines - which he considers essential in constructing and perpetuating positive images of the 'new man' - contributed to an 'increasing acceptance of consumption as part of masculinity in activity and identity'.⁴⁷⁵ However, this is not to suggest that men were not constructed as consumers before the 1980s.

Indeed, it is possible to identify specific points in history when the male has been addressed as a consumer. This often occurs within 'boom periods' symptomatic of certain historical, cultural, and economic circumstances. For example, as Daniel Bell argues, both men and women were affected by the transition to the post industrial society - within which identity was no longer exclusively related to occupation, but rather was primarily constructed via consumption and fashion practices.⁴⁷⁶ Nevertheless, wider prejudices continued to circulate regarding men's relationship to fashion, and those who participated in fashion practices to create identity were still subject to criticism. This is perhaps most apparent in the treatment of the figure of the dandy.

The flamboyant attire of the dandy, in its various incarnations throughout history has traditionally been viewed with suspicion. The dandy was considered a problematic individual, not only insofar as he subverted sexual and gender identities, but also because he blurred class distinctions, often seeking to obscure and simultaneously express 'tensions between notions of elite and mass taste'.⁴⁷⁷ Therefore, the figure of the dandy adopts a 'queer' identity, in that he promotes 'a concept of the self as performance, improvisational, discontinuous and processually constructed by repetition and stylized acts'.⁴⁷⁸ Moreover, it has been claimed that in the mid-1970s dandies were associated primarily with homosexuality and gay subculture. However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is thought that a shift occurred in which dandies became tastemakers for the general

⁴⁷⁴ Edwards, *Men in the Mirror*, p. 39

⁴⁷⁵ Edwards, *Men in the Mirror* p. 39

⁴⁷⁶ Daniel Bell (1976) *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, New York: Basic Books

⁴⁷⁷ Christopher Brewster, 'The Dandy Laid Bare' in Pamela Church Gibson and Stella Bruzzi (eds) *Fashion Culture: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, London: Routledge, p. 237

⁴⁷⁸ Buckley and Ott, 'Fashion(ing/able) Selves', p. 224

heterosexual population.⁴⁷⁹ Moreover, by the mid 1980s specific garments associated with the modern dandy became the influence for high-end designer menswear ('white suits, patterned or flowered vests').⁴⁸⁰

That said, it has been claimed that it was the emergence of the postfeminist era which offered men 'new rationales for guilt-free consumerism'.⁴⁸¹ The concept of the 'new man' in its most recent incarnations as the 'metrosexual' is vital to these contemporary attitudes towards masculinity, fashion and consumption; and, as this chapter shall demonstrate, is central to the construction and circulation of Brody's star persona as a male fashion icon. For as Frank Mort has claimed, the 'new man' movement:

encourage[d] men to look at themselves and other men, visually and as possible objects of consumer desire, and experience pleasures around the body hitherto branded as taboo or only for women. The effect of all this is to open up a space for some new visual codes of masculinity.⁴⁸²

These new visual codes of masculinity resulted in male identity becoming more fragmented and less stable. This is not to suggest that masculinity was ever 'fixed' but that rather, the expression of masculine identity through dress allowed men to 'play with' and construct their own identities to a greater degree. Indeed, there have been claims that the expansion and fragmentation of masculine identities has subverted more dominant cultural norms regarding male sexuality. Therefore, this cultural shift seeks to celebrate, rather than marginalise, the fashion practices of the 'dandy'.

While it is important not to overstate the progressive nature of the 'freedom' allowed by this development – given that it is often claimed that developments within the fashion industry and consumer culture are ultimately determined by the needs of the market – I argue that the 'new visual codes of masculinity' have set a foundation for contemporary fashion icons, such as Adam Brody, who are considered pioneers of specific male fashion trends and styles. As demonstrated in the introduction, Brody is associated with the 'Geek Chic' movement. A necessarily vague term, the concept of 'Geek Chic', encompasses a range of other subcultural styles and designer brands which Brody is thought to have

⁴⁷⁹ See Danae Clark (1993) 'Commoditiy Lesbianism' in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (eds) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, New York: Routledge, pp. 186-201 Lynne Segal (1990) *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press

⁴⁸⁰ Crane, *Fashion and it's Social Agendas*, p. 194

⁴⁸¹ Tasker and Negra, 'Introduction', p. 3

⁴⁸² Mort, "'Boys Own?' Masculinity, Style and Popular Culture', p. 205

introduced to ‘mainstream’ culture. As discussed in Chapter Five, ‘Geek Chic’ is often associated with a ‘lack of style’, or a re-appropriation of clothes traditionally considered unfashionable, ultimately with the aim of looking ‘overly’ studious, intellectual and stylish. As such, this particular style/ cultural movement, creates a masculine identity, which draws from previous understandings of the ‘new man’ as feminised (‘caring and sensitive’) while simultaneously couched within youth subculture which, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, is typically ‘masculine’. Brody then, occupies a position as a ‘sophisticated poacher,’ insofar as he is able to popularise garments traditionally associated with subculture to a mainstream audience. Brody’s ability to traverse the boundary of subculture and mainstream culture is, I would argue, connected to his position as a ‘teen’ star. Indeed, it is often claimed that young people are more likely to create and adopt subcultural styles, insofar as their dress is not typically constrained by occupation. In addition, Ted Polhemus argues that these subcultural styles rarely enjoy any cultural longevity⁴⁸³ - this is often because young peoples’ identities are considered to be especially unstable and transient.

‘Growing Up Brody’: Fashion, Television and Teen Stardom

Between 2003 and 2006, Brody’s star image regularly appeared in Teen magazines including *Teen People*, *CosmoGIRL*, *Teen Vogue* and *Elle Girl*, addressing a primarily female audience. Furthermore, in 2006, Brody was the first male to ever appear on the cover of *Elle Girl* magazine.⁴⁸⁴ Therefore, this first section examines the production and circulation of Brody’s image as fashion/‘subcultural style’ icon within teen magazines.

For feminist critics, girls’ magazines have proved a rich and useful site of analysis ‘because of their power to define and shape teenage femininities’.⁴⁸⁵ While this particular genre occupies a low cultural status (carrying all the pejorative connotations of ‘mass’ culture), productive academic studies have identified girls’ magazines as a space in which complex cultural struggles regarding identity, femininity and consumerism are played out. In particular, Angela McRobbie’s work in the 1980s and 1990s has been especially enlightening in identifying the thematic shifts which have occurred throughout the genre’s history. Pertinent to this study is McRobbie’s later work, in which she acknowledges a change in address: she claims that girls’ magazines in the 1970s address readers as

⁴⁸³ Ted Polhemus (1994) *Street Style: From Sidewalk to Catwalk*, London: Thames and Hudson

⁴⁸⁴ *Elle Girl* (June/July 2006)

⁴⁸⁵ Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture*, p. 167

potential wives and mothers, whereas more recent publications address readers, first and foremost, as consumers. While McRobbie acknowledges how, from a feminist perspective, this shift can be understood as problematic, she also offers a more positive reading of this development. She claims that within contemporary girls' magazines there is 'a redefinition of the feminine self [insofar as it] can be endlessly constructed, reconstructed and customised. No longer lavishing attention on the male partner, the girl is free to lavish attention on herself as she is helped in the task by the world of consumer goods at her disposal.'⁴⁸⁶

As such, readers of teen magazines are offered access to a specific set of cultural competences necessary in *reading* fashion and cultural identities. Indeed, as McRobbie's study indicates, the teen magazine can be understood as a space in which its readers are encouraged to participate in subcultural practices with regard to style. She argues that, rather than a homogenous approach towards 'mainstream' feminine fashions, the texts display 'a spectacular parade of retro, revivalist subcultures which coexist side by side. Fun elements and a strong emphasis on pastiche can be seen.'⁴⁸⁷ Therefore, it is clear that the girls' magazine is a particularly important site in which subculture and mainstream culture co-exist. As such, I posit that it is precisely because the female teenage reader is constructed as adept in reading fashion practices and subcultural styles, that Brody is able to negotiate a position within mainstream culture.

While there is a longstanding tradition of male stars featuring in teen magazines as 'heartthrobs', - particularly 'pop idols'⁴⁸⁸ and, as Turner argues, television soap stars⁴⁸⁹ - Brody's regular appearances in teen magazines often focus on his 'style'. This is not to suggest that Brody's image does not function in more traditional ways as a 'heartthrob' or 'teen icon', but rather, that this preoccupation with fashion and style affects the cultural function of Brody's public persona. Brody's star image then, functions as 'teen fashion icon', however, his exhibition in teen magazines targeting the female reader would suggest that, as opposed to influencing consumption practices of male audiences, his status is used as part of his appeal to teen girl audiences.

⁴⁸⁶ McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, p. 160

⁴⁸⁷ Angela McRobbie (1991) *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'*, London: Macmillan p. 179

⁴⁸⁸ McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, London: Macmillan

⁴⁸⁹ Graeme Turner (2004) *Understanding Celebrity*, London: Sage pp. 37-38

In her study of crossover teen stardom, Susan Murray argues that in the late 1990s, ‘many teen stars developed successful careers in both film and television’⁴⁹⁰ and as such, the ‘crossover appeal’ of teen stars has resulted in audiences expecting ‘their stars to be highly intertextual and highly flexible in their embodiment of heterogeneous character traits.’⁴⁹¹ In so doing, Murray challenges Ellis and Langer’s work which seeks to separate television fame from ‘stardom proper’, insofar as she stresses precisely how the teen TV star produces an incoherent and paradoxical star image. As Ellis notes, star images (as opposed to television personalities) are, by nature, ‘incomplete’ (‘they are composed of clues’)⁴⁹² and as such, audiences are encouraged to participate in the extra-textual fan practices in order to ‘complete’ the star image (i.e. watch *all* the films, read *all* the magazines, buy the celebrity endorsed commodities - indeed, Jermyn’s passage cited in the opening of Chapter Seven attests to this). Brody’s representation within teen magazines also challenges Ellis’ paradigm of television fame, insofar as the texts stress both the similarities to, and differences between, Brody and his onscreen character.

Brody’s appeal to teen audiences relies upon his onscreen character of Seth Cohen, first and foremost, because his character in The O.C. is a teenager. During the first season of The O.C. Brody (24) played a 16 year old. While it is not uncommon for older actors to play younger parts, it is thought that ‘a performer’s age can affect his or her reception’,⁴⁹³ particularly with teen audiences. In fostering a connection between Brody and his onscreen character, teen magazines can circumnavigate any issues regarding the potentially problematic age gap between actor and character.

In addition, Brody’s connection to his onscreen character serves to secure his position as a fashion icon, given that his portrayal as a ‘geek’ onscreen is vital to his role in ‘mainstreaming’ geek chic. As with his female co-stars, Brody’s status as a fashion icon, for a teen (and arguably female) audience, is affirmed through a series of interviews and photo-shoots. These discourses seek to remind readers of his onscreen persona by explicitly referring to his character in interviews and headlines. For example, the first page of the Elle Girl magazine, features a full page image of Brody and the headline ‘Adam

⁴⁹⁰ Susan Murray (2007) ‘I know what you did last summer: Sarah Michelle Gellar and Crossover Teen Stardom’, in Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer (eds) Elana Levine and Lisa Parks, London: Duke University Press, pp. 42- 56

⁴⁹¹ Murray, ‘I Know What You Did Last Summer’, p. 43

⁴⁹² Ellis, Visible Fictions, p. 93

⁴⁹³ Murray, ‘I Know What You Did Last Summer’, p. 46

Brody, Need We Say More? Two things right away: 1, Adam Brody and Seth Cohen are very much alike. 2, Except Adam, is like, way cooler!’⁴⁹⁴ As this quote makes clear, the text arguably seeks to create a tension between Brody’s on and off screen personae: he is similar (‘very much alike’), yet different (‘way cooler’).

In a 2004 issue of Teen Vogue, Brody appears on the cover with former Gilmore Girls co-star (2001-2001) actress Alexis Bledel, next to the headline ‘Ready, Set, Shop: 250+ looks.’⁴⁹⁵ The magazine was created as a teen version of high-end fashion magazine Vogue, and as such presents itself as a fashion magazine above all else (according to the magazine’s mission statement: ‘Fashion Starts Here’).⁴⁹⁶ The function of this article then, as suggested by the cover, is to advertise certain ‘looks’. The six page spread consists of Brody and Bledel in ‘fall’s most charming *date* looks’ [my emphasis].⁴⁹⁷ As such, the article foregrounds Brody’s heterosexuality and thereby suggests that, while Brody’s image circulates within the predominantly ‘feminine’ cultural spheres of both fashion and teen magazines, there is an investment in preserving specific assumptions about Brody’s heterosexual masculinity. As McRobbie notes, in her analysis of 1970s teen magazine Jackie, notions of romance and heterosexuality have long since been crucial to the discursive address of the teen magazine. She claims that the magazine’s features on beauty, fashion, pop music and problem pages, all have underlying romance narratives which foreground the girl’s need to ‘find a boyfriend.’⁴⁹⁸ Indeed, it is possible to extract this reading from the Teen Vogue article which serves to promote Brody’s heterosexuality. I would therefore argue that this text seeks to challenge more traditional understandings of fashion as a preoccupation of solely women and homosexual men.

The photo-shoot seeks to position Brody’s sexuality as ‘non-threatening’ and ‘safe’.⁴⁹⁹ This is achieved primarily through the aesthetic of the shoot - both the sets and the garments have a vintage 1950s look. The pair appear in most photographs together - with one exception in which Brody appears on his own (a point I will return to) - in different

⁴⁹⁴ Anne Ichikawa (June 2006) ‘Adam Brody (Need We Say More?)’ Elle Girl, p. 116

⁴⁹⁵ Lauren Waterman (September 2004) ‘Mixed Doubles’, Teen Vogue, pp. 170-176

⁴⁹⁶ Anon, ‘Teen Vogue: Mission Statement’, <http://www.condenastmediakit.com/tv/> (accessed 12/8/09)

⁴⁹⁷ Lauren Waterman, ‘Mixed Doubles’, p. 170

⁴⁹⁸ McRobbie, Feminism and Youth, p. 131

⁴⁹⁹ This is a common trope within teen magazines. See Sheryl Garrett (1990) ‘Teenage Dreams’, in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds) On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 341-351

‘traditional date’ locations which include a cinema, 1950’s style diner and park. Brody’s wardrobe is limited to light greys and pastel colour palettes, which again work to underline Brody’s arguably ‘feminised’ and non-threatening hetero-masculinity. This particular version of masculinity is also informed by his onscreen performance, insofar as one of the central themes of *The O.C.* was concerned with Seth’s ‘crisis’ of masculinity. Before Ryan arrives in Newport, Seth is characterised as a ‘loner’ and he is often called ‘gay’ (which is intended as an insult) by the other teenagers at his school. However, once Ryan arrives, he provides Seth with a model of hetero-normative masculinity to emulate. As such, Seth ultimately negotiates a ‘sensitive’, heterosexual masculine identity.

Moreover, as suggested above, pastel colours previously associated with the dandy, are incorporated into Brody’s ‘mainstream’ wardrobe. Each photograph is accompanied by details of designers and prices of the clothes worn suggesting that the primary function of the shoot is to sell garments. In some cases it is acknowledged that Brody is wearing his own clothes (it is revealed in the ‘Cover Look’ feature that throughout the shoot, Brody wears his ‘trademark...Chuck Taylor’ Converse shoes), however the designer/make of the garments is still revealed. This information arguably serves a dual purpose. First, it allows audiences a glimpse into Brody’s ‘real’ wardrobe and thereby suggests that Brody has a natural interest in fashion. This, of course, is crucial insofar as it speaks to notions of authenticity which affirm his ‘subcultural’ capital. Second, it affirms Brody’s apparent ‘ownership’ over his own image (and his agency) which is integral to his fashion icon status.

While it could be argued that Brody’s role in this photo-shoot is no more than an ‘accessory’ to Bledel –given that her ensembles are often more spectacular and brightly coloured - Brody appears in one photograph alone, as its sole focus. This would suggest that Brody’s image, and the garments advertised, are of some importance despite the fact that the intended readership is female. Murray argues that, ‘By 1999, the entertainment industry was ...obsessed with [appealing to] twelve- to seventeen-year-olds’.⁵⁰⁰ She claims that in particular, ‘[t]een girls have become the most prized segment of the demographic’.⁵⁰¹ Indeed, Brody’s appearances in teen media would suggest that there has been a deliberate attempt to appeal to female teen audiences. As previously discussed, I

⁵⁰⁰ Murray (2007) ‘I know what you did last summer’, p. 44

⁵⁰¹ Murray (2007) ‘I know what you did last summer’, p. 44

would argue that this is directly related to the unique position that girls' magazines hold in relation to subculture and mainstream culture. However, in addition, it has also been argued, with regard to the male icons of the classical era, that the male fashion icon must be 'an object of desire for women, a role model for straight men, and either or both for gay men.'⁵⁰² Indeed, the two latter aspects are foregrounded within his contemporaneous appearances in men's fashion magazines Nylon Guys and GQ.

Reading Masculinity: Masculinity and Men's Magazines

In the same year as the Teen Vogue issue, Brody appeared several times in GQ magazine. GQ, emerged specifically as a 'style guide' for men positioning itself as a high-end magazine (in terms of price and content). Indeed, GQ seeks to educate its target readership (affluent white males) in fashion and lifestyle and is often referred to as 'the magazine for men with an IQ'.⁵⁰³ It could be argued that GQ addresses the contemporary equivalent of the 'dandy' - i.e. the metrosexual. In his analysis of Queer Eye for a Straight Guy (2003 -), Steven Cohan defines the metrosexual male as 'a youngish, upscale, heterosexual male who spends money on his appearance (and so much money on hairstyling, fashionable clothing, and skin products) that he is readable as "gay" and too liberal to mind the mistake - but hands off please!'⁵⁰⁴ As Cohen's comments make clear, while the metrosexual's interest in fashion and beauty practices aligns him with gay subculture, there is a concurrent discourse which affirms his heterosexuality and 'traditional'(straight) masculinity. GQ magazine constructs its readers in relation to these conflicting discourses insofar as it seeks to present fashion and grooming as 'acceptable' practices, while also fiercely reiterating its commitment to maintaining hetero-normative masculine values.

The December 2004 'Men of the Year' issue features 'The Men of *The O.C.*' in a two page spread promoting the show. It is evident within this particular article that Brody's position as a television actor on a teen 'primetime soap opera' – with all the 'feminine' connotations such status inescapably brings – becomes a potential problem for a magazine which seeks to address a heterosexual male audience. Indeed, this is reflected in the opening paragraph which adopts an overtly misogynistic tone:

⁵⁰² Edward Buscombe, 'Cary Grant', in Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson, Fashion Cultures: Theories, Exploration and Analysis, London: Routledge p. 201

⁵⁰³ Edwards, Men in the Mirror, p. 80

⁵⁰⁴ Steven Cohan (2007) 'Queer Eye for the Straight Guise: Camp, Postfeminism and the Fab Five's Makeovers of Masculinity', in Yvonne Tasker and Diana Negra (eds) Interrogating Postfeminism, Durham and London: Duke University Press p. 181

It's the women who make *The O.C.* a soap opera: the coked-up stripper aunt, the knocked-up Chicana from the wrong side of the 5, the neighbour lady planking the daughter's ex-boyfriend. But while the female characters are driving the plot all over kingdom come...it's the men that make the show so much fun to watch.⁵⁰⁵

As the comments above demonstrate, there is a need to justify why a feature which focuses on a 'soap opera' is included in a men's magazine. Here, there is an apparent rejection of 'feminine' culture, while simultaneously attempting to legitimate the magazine's interest in a 'trivial' genre opera. This discourse, I would suggest, shapes the content of this article. For example, in the final paragraph (which focuses specifically on Brody) it is claimed that:

Adam Brody swings as the overthinking, overtalking, irono-geek Seth Cohen. He skateboards between being in the show and wryly observing it – just as we do – calling out all the bullshit... His steady stream of asides and metacomments reassures us that we're not complete tools for loving the same night time soap as our 11-year-old nieces.⁵⁰⁶

Here, the journalist positions himself, and the magazine's potential readers, as knowledgeable viewers, who presumably (unlike female viewers) are able to maintain a critical distance from the show. Moreover, the passage above also demonstrates how Brody, and even his onscreen character, maintains a 'critical distance'. Brody's onscreen persona is presented as an observer/spectator, arguably in an attempt to remove Brody's connection to the 'feminine' genre/medium.

In a later issue in 2004, Brody appears alone in an article titled 'The Short Suit Steps Out' and the accompanying fashion photo-shoot, designed to advertise different styles of men's suits. As discussed in Chapter Five, the business suit is most commonly associated with the 'leisure class' (despite its work connotations). Moreover, as Crane demonstrates, '[s]ince it achieved its present form at the end of the nineteenth century, there have been strict rules about exactly how a business suit is made and worn'.⁵⁰⁷ In addition, she notes that '[c]omparable rules governing appropriate hemlines for women's clothes have disappeared',⁵⁰⁸ thereby suggesting that meanings associated with the suit remain more stable than the rules which govern women's attire, which she implies can be continually

⁵⁰⁵ Rory Evans (December 2004) 'Men of *The O.C.*: Pride of the County', *GQ*, p. 332

⁵⁰⁶ Evans, 'Men of *The O.C.*', p. 332

⁵⁰⁷ Crane, *Fashion and it's Social Agendas*, p. 173

⁵⁰⁸ Crane, *Fashion and it's Social Agendas*, p. 200

made and remade. In particular, the business suit is symbolic of traditional masculinity- as demonstrated in Chapter Five, its cut is designed to emphasise the shape of the male body (e.g. broad shoulders and chest). Furthermore, as Alan Flusser argues, rigid and unchanging rules regarding ‘the shape and proper proportions of.... lapels, collars and trouser length and width’⁵⁰⁹ remain dominant in contemporary society. Equally, the ‘acceptable’ colour range of suits is particularly narrow - often restricted to charcoal, navy and black.

That said, in their book Jocks and Nerds: Men’s Style in the Twentieth Century, (which as the title makes clear examines the negotiations between mainstream and subcultural styles) Richard Martin and Harold Koda argue that ‘[t]he suit [can be understood as] a nuanced and varied garment’.⁵¹⁰ Indeed, the fashion spread in GQ seeks to present the suit as a garment which has undergone subtle changes in tailoring. For example, the article’s tagline claims that:

Not since the early 60’s have suits been cut so short and trim. The O.C’s Adam Brody tries on the best of this season’s offerings - proving that just because you’re suited up, it doesn’t mean that bigger is always better.⁵¹¹

In the accompanying photo-shoot, an unshaven Brody models Dior, Marc Jacobs, Ennio Capara and Junya Watanabe suits. The shoot signals Brody as ‘extraordinary’, demonstrating his difference from both his onscreen character and his fans. His unshaven and more adult look marks a departure from his teen icon image. Moreover, the ‘quality’ aesthetic of the professional photographs coupled with the luxury items on display convey his connection to a glamorous lifestyle.

Each of these suits depart, in some way, from the more traditional rules of tailoring outlined above. For example, in the first image Brody wears a bottle green corduroy suit – this is, of course, not only an unlikely material for a ‘business’ suit but also, the colour deviates from the ‘appropriate’ muted palette previously discussed. Similarly, Brody’s Junya Watanabe suit also uses non-traditional colours.

⁵⁰⁹ Alan J. Flusser (1989) Clothes and the Man: The Principle of Men’s Dress, New York: Villard Books p. 7

⁵¹⁰ Martin and Koda (1989) Jocks and Nerds: Men’s Style in the Twentieth Century New York: Rizzoli International publications, p. 151

⁵¹¹ Anon (October 2004) ‘The Short Suit Steps Out’, GQ, p. 323



Figure 6: Adam Brody, GQ

Moreover, the Japanese fashion designer, renowned for his innovative and distinctive designs,⁵¹² abandons those precise specifications which govern proportions of trouser length and width - as the tagline suggests: 'the days of the long, drapey, soft-shouldered NBA style suits are over'.⁵¹³

Therefore, this particular shoot concerns itself with the re-appropriation of the suit, which as the article suggests, is witnessing a revival of 1960s 'retro' styles. Brody's associations with subcultural style prove useful as these 'innovative' designs are assimilated into the mainstream. Moreover, the shoot, I would suggest is preoccupied with educating readers in fashion practices via the dissemination of knowledge regarding tailoring and high fashion culture. For example, the tagline situates the current trend within a historical context, remarking on the vintage feel of the cut, thereby demonstrating a knowledge of fashion history.

While the article seeks to educate potential consumers in tailoring, Brody's image serves to educate consumers on 'individual style'. In one photograph, Brody wears a Marc Jacobs suit with a pair of Chuck Taylor Converse trainers. This particular photograph then, not

⁵¹² Watanabe designs featured in the 2001 'Radical Fashions' exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

⁵¹³ Anon (October 2004) 'The Short Suit Steps Out', GQ, p. 323

only advertises an alternative, more casual way of accessorising suits, but also serves to remind us of Brody's personal subcultural style. As mentioned above, Brody is often featured wearing this particular brand of shoe – Teen Vogue describes them as his 'trademark' and as such this photograph hints at Brody's own creativity and ownership over his image. Indeed, this is also crucial in protecting the (sub)cultural value of his star image.

Furthermore, Brody's alternative style is associated with a particular version of masculinity which is foregrounded within this photo-shoot. As the tagline suggests, the particular configuration of masculinity Brody embodies is less to do with actual physicality (bigger isn't always better) and more to do with an intellectual, yet firmly heterosexual, masculinity. The 'Geek Chic' movement that Brody has supposedly pioneered relies upon an intellectual and sensitive masculinity, reminiscent of a specific version of the 'new man'. Therefore, the GQ feature arguably seeks to present a more mainstream version of 'Geek Chic'.

In June 2006, Brody appeared on the cover of Nylon Guys magazine, which by its own admission, is 'not for girls'. The magazine launched in 2006, following the success of its sister publication Nylon (launched in 2001) and, according to its mission statement, seeks to address a younger male demographic than GQ. Moreover, the magazine primarily focuses on 'culture and fashion' which emerges from the cultural centres New York and London, and arguably aims to present itself as, slightly 'edgier' than GQ. The 'ironic' not for girls tagline would suggest that the magazine is attempting to align itself with the so-called 'New Lad' culture.⁵¹⁴ 'New Lad' culture is often viewed as a rejection/response to 'New Man' culture insofar as it is often characterised by an 'ironic' misogyny which ultimately proffers debasing attitudes toward feminine/feminist culture.⁵¹⁵

Yet, Nylon Guys is clearly symptomatic of developments within postfeminist consumer culture which have encouraged men to engage in fashion and grooming practices; however, this preoccupation with fashion is framed within more 'anti-fashion' attitudes. In other words, Nylon Guys also fosters a relationship with 'subculture' and 'street style'. For example, the editor's letter in the June 2006 issue claims 'And as always this *NYLON Guys*

⁵¹⁴ A term conceptualised by journalist Sean O'Hara

⁵¹⁵ Rosalind Gill, 'Power and the Production of Subjects: A Genealogy of the New Man and the New Lad', <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/genderInstitute/pdf/sexualObjectification.pdf> (accessed 24/7/10)

is packed with tons of T-shirts, sneakers, gadgets and other stuff you never knew you wanted'.⁵¹⁶ Indeed, the editor's comments are buttressed by the notion that while developments within consumer culture have resulted in an acceptance of men as consumers of fashion, there is still an underlying concern and hostility towards capitalist society which generates irresponsible consumers (which as previously discussed are typically coded as 'feminine'). This speaks to the 'anti-establishment' subcultural views which structure the magazine's discourse (while of course, simultaneously engaging in, and reaping the economic benefits of, late capitalism).

The magazine is able to affirm its subcultural capital through its content, which according to the cover of the June 2006 issue contains, '144 pages of cool sh*t!', 'The World's Top Snow-boarders Chill in Chile', and 'Hot Indie Chicks'. Again, the ironic language used, I would suggest, seeks to position the magazine as 'smart' and 'edgy' and constructs its reader as 'sophisticated' and 'savvy'. Moreover, the inclusion of 'Hot Indie Chicks' transparently addresses a heterosexual audience. With regard to the construction of Brody's image, there is also evidence to suggest that an attempt has been made to contain any 'gay' reading of his identity.

Indeed, the first of a six page spread in the magazine taps into this 'ironic' attitude towards new versions of masculinity and lad culture, arguably in an attempt to foreground a distinctly hetero-masculine identity. The tagline reads, 'Drinking? Drumming? Doing Older Women? You Bet Adam Brody is kicking his teen heart-throb image to the curb.'⁵¹⁷ Indeed, as evidenced in the GQ article, Brody's association with 'feminine', 'teen' and 'mainstream' culture proves problematic for a magazine which endeavours to position itself as 'alternative'. As such, the photo-shoot and interview for Nylon Guys arguably seems intent on drawing attention to, and subsequently distancing Brody from, his 'teen icon' image. Furthermore, the interview and photo-shoot with Brody in Nylon Guys seeks to present a more 'authentic' image of Brody than that which circulates in teen media. For example, within the interview Brody discusses the Nylon Guys photo-shoot. He remarks on the constructed nature of teen media claiming 'It was so cool, I've had to do way too many teen magazines where they're like, "Giggle!" Or "Hold the bunny rabbit!"'⁵¹⁸ Brody's disparaging comments work to create a notion of distance between his 'feminised'

⁵¹⁶ Marvin Scott Jarrett (editor in chief) (June 2006) 'Letter From the Editor', Nylon Guys, p. 12

⁵¹⁷ April Long (June 2006) 'Growing Up Brody', Nylon Guys p. 190

⁵¹⁸ Adam Brody quoted in Long, 'Growing Up Brody', p. 190

‘teen’ magazine persona and his traditional masculine identity. Moreover, it suggests that Brody has evolved from his teen persona, adopting a more ‘fixed’ masculine identity. However, it should be noted that this more mature star persona continues to pivot on a connection to ‘subculture’ style (in the photo-shoot Brody is pictured wearing predominantly mid-price ‘alternative’ designer clothes; Penguin, Vans, Atticus) which serves as the ‘connective tissue’ between Brody and his fans. Of course, the primary function of subcultural style is to demonstrate ones allegiance to a particular group of ‘likeminded’ individuals. Therefore, Brody’s investment in subculture seeks to strengthen the bonds between his star image and ‘subcultural’ fan community.

Both GQ and Nylon Guys magazines foster a complex relationship to mainstream culture – while of course they are both arguably ‘mass’ cultural objects, I would suggest that they reject the feminine connotations associated with ‘mass’ culture and redefine their own relationship with the world of fashion and grooming practices as masculine. As such, these texts ‘raid’ and re-appropriate feminine culture in order to make it ‘legitimate’. It is precisely within this ‘liminal’ space that Brody’s star persona – which can be both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ and ‘subculture’ and ‘mainstream’ – functions as a cultural intermediary.

To be sure, both Nylon Guys and GQ, and Teen Vogue arguably seek to address a readership with the cultural competences in fashion practices, who are able to read articulations of identity. Indeed, what is particularly interesting with regard to Brody’s image is that there is evidence to suggest that he promotes, not only the use of fashion as a marker of identity, but equally seeks to demonstrate the artifice and performativity of fashion and indeed his own star identity. In this sense, Brody embodies a ‘queer’ identity which pivots on a ‘break with dominant desire to categorize and normalize’.⁵¹⁹ This concept of performativity and artifice is explored in further detail in the following chapter, which examines the ways in which notions of ‘authenticity’ and ethnicity can be seen as crucial to America Ferrera’s star image.

⁵¹⁹ Ott and Buckley, ‘Fashion(ing/able) Selves’, p. 213

Chapter Nine

Locating the Real: America Ferrera, Fashion, Ethnicity and Authenticity

‘There was Rachel in *Friends*, there was Carrie in *SATC*, then there was *Ugly Betty*.’⁵²⁰

According to Glamour Magazine (US), ‘America Ferrera, star of *Ugly Betty*, is climbing Hollywood’s A-list – and she’s ignoring the unwritten rule that says stars must be blond and Twizzler-thin.’⁵²¹ America Ferrera’s physicality and ethnicity is often discussed within the popular press, as she is positioned against the predominantly white, blond and ‘Twizzler-thin’ feminine ideal. Indeed, the female star’s body is subject to scrutiny within celebrity texts which seek to perpetuate the notion of the ideal body. Moreover, this takes place within a wider representational context in which, as Su Holmes and Sean Redmond have argued, ‘the celebrity self is to be prodded, probed and exposed in such a way that revels in the *processes of corporeal fabrication*, rather than the finished product itself’ [emphasis in original].⁵²²

In this chapter, I examine America Ferrera’s star image in celebrity and fashion magazines - which are conventionally preoccupied with the star body. However, rather than revealing the ‘*processes of corporeal fabrication*’, I argue that the representation of Ferrera’s star body actually ‘mystifies’ (while seeking to appear to ‘demystify’) these processes. In other words, it seeks to ‘naturalise’ Ferrera’s star body, rather than acknowledge its position as a cultural construct. This chapter then, seeks to continue to examine debates raised with regard to the two previous case studies, insofar as it explores Ferrera’s function as a cultural intermediary within contemporary celebrity and consumer culture.

In particular, this chapter argues that the construction of Ferrera’s star persona (and its focus on the star’s corporeal self) is structured by two conflicting discourses regarding the relationship between fashion, identity and ethnicity. That is, while Ferrera’s star image is used to dramatise essentialist (albeit contradictory) ideologies regarding Latina ethnicity (i.e. that it is simultaneously ‘authentic’, ‘exotic’, ‘dangerous’ and ‘excessive’), it also draws attention to the performative nature of fashion and its ability to transcend cultural identities.

⁵²⁰ Anon, (December 2007) ‘The 100 People We Love Right Now’, Marie Claire, p.183

⁵²¹ Laurie Sandell (October 2007) ‘Surprise! She’s a bombshell (and you can be one too)’, Glamour Magazine, p. 289

⁵²² Su Holmes and Sean Redmond (eds) (2006) Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture, London & New York: Routledge p. 123

As with SJP, extra-textual discourse invokes the ‘Cinderella Motif’ and frames Ferrera’s star image within a contemporary makeover narrative. However, rather than demonstrating her difference – as the Cinderella motif does with regard to SJP – the makeover narrative foregrounds Ferrera’s ordinariness/everydayness. Indeed, while it is unsurprising that Ferrera’s image does not function in the same way as SJP’s, Ferrera’s difference is also articulated in her relationship to fashion. Unlike SJP, Ferrera does not become a mediator between *haute couture* and consumers. Rather, she is more commonly associated with ‘everyday’ fashion – despite her onscreen associations with the realm of high fashion. This is further constructed by the celebrity intertexts in which she circulates. For example, unlike SJP, Ferrera is yet to appear on the cover of high-end, self-titled ‘style bible’ Vogue, or its competitor Harper’s Bazaar. Rather, she often appears on the cover of middle-brow, teenage magazines, such as Seventeen and Glamour.

‘Real Celebrities Have Curves’: Star Bodies, Ethnicity and Authenticity

In his book Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture, P. David Marshall argues that ‘[t]he intense focus on the body and its reformulation is central to the construction of the female star’.⁵²³ While it is often thought that the proliferation of celebrity magazines and blogs in the contemporary cultural landscape has intensified the constant scrutiny of the female star’s body, the phenomenon itself is not new. Indeed, in Kathy Davis’ article ‘Beauty and the Female Body’, it is clear that the current preoccupation with the female star body is informed by historical discourses surrounding the beautiful woman as ‘muse’.⁵²⁴ Moreover, scholarship examining early and classical Hollywood stardom reveals that historically, the female body has been central to the economic and symbolic value of the star. As such, initial academic inquiries into the function of star images are informed, to varying degrees, by Mulvey’s influential theory of the ‘gaze’.⁵²⁵ This is not to suggest, however, that the female star body was relegated to function exclusively as an object of the desire, for as Dyer demonstrates with regard to Marilyn Monroe, the body was also inscribed with multiple (and often disparate) meanings that worked to affirm the dominant ideologies regarding gender, sexuality and race in

⁵²³ Marshall, Celebrity and Power, p. 266

⁵²⁴ Kathy Davis (2006) ‘Beauty and the Female Body’ in P. David Marshall (eds) The Celebrity Culture Reader, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 557-580

⁵²⁵ Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’

society.⁵²⁶ Indeed, it was precisely because the body was so important with regard to the female star that it became so central to the ideological meanings that were conveyed.

A body of scholarship has emerged with a specific focus on the ethnic female star and its representation within American media. For example, Diane Negra's book Off White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom, explores 'the complex ways in which [ethnic female] stars delight and trouble the national imagination'⁵²⁷ through their representation in Hollywood film. Negra therefore, seeks to challenge the assumption that the ethnic female star functions as a mere 'stereotype'. Despite that fact that, '[the ethnic female star]' has so often been represented as excessive, hypersexual, primitive, animalistic or exotic',⁵²⁸ Negra argues that the 'ideological/cultural work she performs is much more complex and variable'.⁵²⁹ While Negra's study focuses specifically on white European-American actresses, work on Latina representation in onscreen media - such as Ana Lopez's article 'Are All Latins from Manhattan?: Hollywood, Ethnography, and Cultural Colonialism', Angharad Valdivia's book A Latina in the Land of Hollywood and Other Essays on Media Culture, and Mary Beltran's book Latina/o Stars in U.S Eyes: The Making and Meaning of TV Stardom⁵³⁰ - acknowledges an equally ambivalent relationship between Hollywood and the Latina star.

The work cited above demonstrates the centrality of the Latina star body to its cultural and economic worth. In particular, both Valdivia and Beltran's work purports that the Latina star's body (as represented in Hollywood) is 'ambiguous' and can therefore 'be marshalled... to represent, and of course appeal or sell to, whiteness, but they can also represent generalized otherness as well as more specific stereotypical Latinidad and a range of other ethnicities'.⁵³¹ For example, Beltran suggests that Jennifer Lopez's 'mainstream fame' is due to the fact that her racially 'ambiguous' (highly visible) body

⁵²⁶ Richard Dyer (1986) Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society, London: BFI Macmillan

⁵²⁷ Diane Negra (2001) Off White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom, London and New York: Routledge, p. 3

⁵²⁸ Negra, Off White Hollywood, p. 3

⁵²⁹ Negra, Off White Hollywood, p.3

⁵³⁰ Ana Lopez (1991) 'Are All Latins from Manhattan?: Hollywood, Ethnography, and Cultural Colonialism', in Lester D. Friedman (ed) Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 404-424 Angharad Valdivia (2000) A Latina in the Land of Hollywood and Other Essays on Media Culture, Arizona: University of Arizona, Mary Beltran (2009) Latina/o Stars in U.S Eyes: The Making and Meaning of TV Stardom, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press

⁵³¹ Angharad Valdivia (Spring 2004) 'Latinas as Radical Hybrid: Transnationally gendered traces in mainstream media' in Global of Media Journal 3:4, <http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/sp05/sp04/gmj-sp04-valdivia.htm> (last accessed 26/5/10)

allows her to play a range of ethnic identities in contemporary cinema.⁵³² Valdivia makes a similar case for Jessica Alba. She writes: '[s]ince graduating from Disney, she has played the hybrid, ambiguous, and post-apocalyptic Dark Angel as well as African American hip hop queen in the feature length Honey' (2003)).⁵³³ This 'ambiguity', Valdivia argues, is due to the fact that 'Latinas as a constructed category gain meaning by virtue of their supposed location as an in between ethnicity, not white yet not black.'⁵³⁴ Yet, despite this ambiguity, the Latina star is associated with essentialist ideals of 'ethnic meaning'.⁵³⁵

In her study on ethnic female stardom, Negra argues that contemporary celebrity invokes fantasies of 'ethnic meaning' which can be divided into four categories. These are, 'Ethnicity as Excess', 'Ethnicity as the sign of sincerity and/or authenticity', 'Ethnicity as a restorative response to the evacuation of contemporary culture' and finally 'Ethnicity as individual empowerment'.⁵³⁶ Indeed, several of these categories intersect with broader narratives of fame examined within stardom and celebrity studies. For example, Gamson notes that notions of 'authenticity' are central to audience/star identification practices both historically and in the contemporary period (discussed below).⁵³⁷ Thus Negra suggests that in some cases, ethnicity can serve as a 'code for authenticity'.⁵³⁸ Similarly, while Negra claims that the ethnic star functions as 'a restorative response to the evacuation of contemporary culture', Dyer asserts that the star image has long been used to 'reinforce values under threat'.⁵³⁹ So in this regard, Negra argues that the ethnic star functions as a response to the apparent 'homogenization of American culture... [as a] method of claiming difference'.⁵⁴⁰

These discourses on ethnicity jostle for position, and can be located within the representations of Ferrera's star image. Indeed, the intense focus on Ferrera's star body, both on and off screen, has contributed to the construction of her star persona and its symbolic value in contemporary consumer culture. Her first role in the independent

⁵³² Mary Beltran (2007) 'The Hollywood Latina Body as Site of Social Struggle: Media Constructions of Stardom and Jennifer Lopez' "Cross-over Butt" in Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (eds) Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader, London: Sage, pp. 275-286

⁵³³ Valdivia, 'Latinas as Radical Hybrid: Transnationally gendered traces in mainstream media'

⁵³⁴ Valdivia, 'Latinas as Radical Hybrid: Transnationally gendered traces in mainstream media'

⁵³⁵ Negra, Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom, p. 138

⁵³⁶ Negra, Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom, p. 138

⁵³⁷ Gamson, Claims to Fame

⁵³⁸ Negra, Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom, p. 147

⁵³⁹ Dyer, Stars

⁵⁴⁰ Negra, Off-White Hollywood, p. 154

‘coming of age’ film Real Women Have Curves (2002), subsequent roles in The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants (2005 & 2008) films, and Ugly Betty not only foreground Ferrera’s ‘excessive’ body within the narrative but are also key in structuring discourses surrounding the extra-textual circulation of her image. As first generation Mexican-American teenager Ana Garcia in Real Women Have Curves, Ferrera’s ‘Latina’ body is positioned as a site of ideological struggle. Within the narrative, Garcia struggles to consolidate her family’s wishes for her to start a family and work in her sister’s dress making factory, with her own desire to study at university. This narrative is played out through a series of discussions between Garcia and her mother which constantly refer to Ferrera’s physicality - thereby linking notions of ethnicity and fantasies of assimilation directly to her ‘curvy’ body. In the role of Betty Suarez in Ugly Betty, (as demonstrated in Chapter Six) Ferrera’s ethnic body is also of narrative importance. Betty’s position as ‘Latina’ in the fashion industry (which privileges extreme versions of western ideals of beauty, which are typically white and thin), exaggerates and ridicules ignorant attitudes towards racial ‘otherness’ in contemporary culture. As such, Ferrera’s onscreen roles inform her public persona insofar as her star body is presented as a representational tool, used to promote specific notions of ethnic femininity and assimilation in contemporary society.

‘God Bless America’: The American Dream and Narratives of Ethnic Stardom

As with SJP, Ferrera’s stardom is framed within a version of the success myth (Dyer). However, unlike SJP, Ferrera’s Latina identity is crucial to the ways in which her rise to stardom is narrativised within press discourses. For example, during the promotion of The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants, Ferrera and her co-stars, Amber Tamblyn, Alexis Bledel and Blake Lively appear on U.S talk show The View. During the interview Blake Lively (daughter of actor Ernie Lively) is asked how she got into acting. In response, she recalls how her brother (actor Eric Lively) decided on her behalf that she would enjoy acting and ‘pressured his agents’ into calling her. She then reveals that she auditioned for a couple of months - often cancelling auditions as she ‘didn’t realise what a big deal it was’ - before accepting the role of Bridget Vreeland in the film. Lively’s fame can therefore be characterised as ‘ascribed’ as opposed to ‘achieved’.⁵⁴¹ It is through the image of the ‘famous family’ or ‘dynasty’ that Lively’s fame is situated. In this televised interview she

⁵⁴¹ Rojek, Celebrity

gives no indication of any difficulties she faced, rather her fame seems somewhat ‘accidental’. In stark contrast, when Ferrera is asked to comment on her decision to pursue a career as an actor, she reveals a distinctly different experience:

Vieira: Your mum really made you *work* to become an actress. What did she do? She just didn’t just hand it to you on a carpet right? [emphasis in original]

Ferrera: No I mean it was never anything she really wanted for me. I was always a really good student and she wanted me to go to Harvard, go to Yale. She came here from Honduras mainly for us to get an education and so when I said I wanted to be an actress it was not in her plans. And I really, really wanted it, so she wasn’t going to stop me but she said “I can’t drive you... if this is something you wanna do... you’re going to have to work for this”, and she got me a job waitressing... So I would waitress and then get the bus to school... I think it was good for me. Really, really good for me.⁵⁴²

The above passage immediately demonstrates some of the traditional narratives of fame and how, in Ferrera’s case, they intersect with dominant ideologies of ethnicity and class. First, it is important to note how, in contrast to Lively, Ferrera’s fame can be categorised, in Rojek’s terms, as ‘achieved’. This is reflected in the question posed by Vieira (insofar as she stresses the word ‘work’) and again in Ferrera’s answer which demonstrates a strong work ethic (for example, she claims not only to be an intelligent and hardworking student, but also is willing to undertake additional low paid work in order to facilitate her dream). Ferrera is therefore characterised as the antithesis of Lively, not only in corporeal terms, insofar as Lively is 5ft 10, thin, white with long blond hair, but in the ways in which they have achieved their celebrity status.⁵⁴³ Second, I wish to highlight how Ferrera’s ‘Latina’ identity is presented as central to this work ethic – she explicitly reminds viewers of her Honduran roots, which signify poverty in this context (she explains that she is one of six children and as such her single mother was unable to drive her to auditions). Moreover, the passage above perfectly articulates a version of the American Dream which is reliant on ‘overcoming’ ethnicity. Of course, notions of assimilation are conjured by her name alone, but in addition, Ferrera recalls how her mother brought her children to the United States as it promised a better education (and life). As Negra notes, ‘[a]s female embodiments of national fantasies, ethnic female film stars have symbolized the promise of American pluralism and proved the desirability and reliability of the American Dream (sometimes in

⁵⁴² Ferrera on *The View* (ABC, aired on 26/5/2005)

⁵⁴³ Interestingly, rumours circulated within the popular press that the pair did not get on – often this was articulated as if Ferrera was in someway ‘jealous’ of Lively – see *The Soup* (aired 11th August 2008).

triumphant success narratives, sometimes in negative object lessons)'.⁵⁴⁴ As the above exchange makes clear, Ferrera demonstrates the 'desirability and reliability' of the American Dream insofar as she describes how she '*really, really* wanted it'. Moreover, her anecdote also illustrates the 'value' of having to work for success. She claims, 'I think it was good for me, really, really good for me'. Here, Ferrera affirms her 'strong sense of self' and demonstrates how her ethnicity (and implied struggles) allowed her to achieve 'individual empowerment.'

This discourse resonates in another interview with Ferrera in fashion magazine Marie Claire. In the December 2007 issue, Ferrera appears on the cover next to the tagline: 'America Ferrera, Living the dream thanks to *Ugly Betty*'.⁵⁴⁵ As with the interview on The View, Ferrera's fame is again situated within the 'success myth' - on this occasion the magazine's rhetoric explicitly references the 'American Dream'. Moreover, the article titled 'God Bless America' foregrounds Ferrera's position as a role model. Beside the title, the tagline reads: 'A Cinderella life story and a genuine antidote to Hollywood's size-zero culture, *Ugly Betty*'s America Ferrera is the reluctant role model who rewrote the rule book, both on screen and off screen.'⁵⁴⁶ As this comment makes clear, the Cinderella motif (which as discussed in Chapter Seven is an incarnation of the success myth) is employed here to articulate Ferrera's fame. Moreover, the comment suggests that her position as a 'role model' is directly linked to her body. This is reinforced as the article continues as Ferrera remarks upon the 'size zero' culture. She claims '[t]he tragedy about this whole image-obsessed society is that young girls get so caught up in it, they forget to realise how much more they have to offer the world.'⁵⁴⁷ Inherent within Ferrera's comment is the notion that the 'image-obsessed society' is both 'trivial', and potentially 'dangerous'. This of course, is at variance with Ferrera's fashion icon status assigned to her by the magazine (it is explicitly claimed in their feature about '100 People We Love Right Now' cited in the opening of this chapter). However, as I shall demonstrate, part of Ferrera's function as a fashion icon and cultural intermediary, is precisely to promote a 'responsible', 'positive' understanding of fashion and its relationship to female identity (and the body). For example, it is important to note that this issue of Marie Claire is committed to promoting more 'positive' understandings of fashion – this is suggested in the publication's

⁵⁴⁴ Negra, *Off White Hollywood*, p.3

⁵⁴⁵ (December 2007) Marie Claire

⁵⁴⁶ David A. Keeps (December 2007) 'God Bless America', Marie Claire, p. 138

⁵⁴⁷ Ferrera in Keeps, 'God Bless America', p. 140

tagline/mission statement titled 'Fashion with Heart.' Next to the editor's letter - which in itself boasts a commitment to 'ethical consumerism, eco trends and corporate responsibility...while maintaining our style cred [sic] (looking good is non-negotiable)',⁵⁴⁸ - the 'Fashion with Heart' mission statement reveals that Marie Claire seeks to 'publish stories that inspire our readers to make responsible consumer choices' and '[r]aise awareness of inspirational women whose voices aren't otherwise heard'.⁵⁴⁹ Within this final agenda item, there is the implication that this includes, even if it does not explicitly refer to, women of ethnic minorities.

As such, America Ferrera becomes a spokesperson for 'The Fashion with Heart' campaign. As her comments above make clear, she expresses an interest in promoting responsible consumption and fashion practices. Indeed, this is, as demonstrated in Chapter Seven, also central to the construction of SJP's star image and position as fashion icon. With regard to Ferrera, in order to qualify her for this role, the article foregrounds her own 'individual empowerment', and sense of self. The article reads: 'Blessed with a strong sense of herself and an admirable set of boundaries, Ferrera is in no danger of becoming the next young Hollywood bad girl.'⁵⁵⁰ In many ways her Latina identity 'immunises' her against the supposed 'epidemic' of 'bad girls' which, as Diane Negra and Su Holmes suggest, are typically white and working class.⁵⁵¹ Ferrera, therefore, is defined against the female 'white trash' type currently pervading celebrity culture.

Ferrera's strong sense of self (foregrounded in celebrity intertexts) can be read as a response to contemporary concerns that identity is apparently becoming increasingly fragmented and unstable (as outlined in Chapter Six). Moreover, Ferrera's sense of self, I would argue, is reliant on the essentialist ideal of the ethnic identity as 'sincere/authentic'. Within the interview, Ferrera recalls her childhood struggles and as in the talk show interview discussed above, she recalls the additional problems that arose precisely because of her cultural identity. For example, she claims that as a child she realised that 'Nobody cares who I am in this world. I could just be another pregnant teen or another druggie, and it's not going to affect anyone but me, I would sit on that bus and think, "That's not going

⁵⁴⁸ Marie O'Riordan (December 2007) 'Editor's Letter', Marie Claire, p. 15

⁵⁴⁹ Marie O'Riordan (December 2007) 'Fashion with Heart', Marie Claire, p. 15

⁵⁵⁰ Keeps, 'God Bless America', pp.141-143

⁵⁵¹ Diane Negra and Su Holmes (2008) 'Introduction: GOING CHEAP? Female Celebrity in Reality, Tabloid and Scandal Genres' in Genders http://www.genders.org/g48/g48_negraholmes.html (last accessed 11/6/10)

to be me. I'm going to do something with my life.'"⁵⁵² Here, Ferrera references some of the negative stereotypes of Latinas (that they are 'hypersexual' and 'morally ambiguous') which resonate with the white cultural imagination, and positions herself in opposition to them. Moreover, in the Marie Claire interview she explicitly recalls her living conditions as a child. She claims:

There was never very much to go around... Within a mile or two there were very, very low-income flats. Another quarter of a mile away, you had fancy lawyers' houses in gated communities. The kids I grew up with had BMWs when they were 15. It was weird moving in-between these circles of people, because I didn't really fit in anywhere.⁵⁵³

The journalist, David A. Keeps, then explicitly affirms how this sense of exclusion is directly related to her ethnicity, he writes: '[t]his was as much cultural as it was social'.⁵⁵⁴ Moreover the article continues with Ferrera remarking upon her Honduran roots. She asserts:

I mean, sure, we ate beans and rice, but we also had pizza and burgers, so I don't know what part of my upbringing is authentically Honduran and what isn't. It's crazy –I have never even stepped foot on Honduran soil but, somehow, it is a huge part of who I am.⁵⁵⁵

This passage is particularly complex and demonstrates perfectly the conflicting ideologies which circulate with regard to the Latina identity. In her canonical article 'Ethnicities-in-Relation: Toward a Multicultural Reading of American Cinema',⁵⁵⁶ Ella Shohat challenges the assumption that ethnic identity is stable and unchanging. She argues that onscreen representations of ethnicities often rely upon 'textual context' in order to have meaning. That is, she writes, '[e]thnicity does not constitute a fixed entity or category expressing a natural, essential difference, but rather a changing set of historically diverse experiences situated within power relations'.⁵⁵⁷ Indeed, Ferrera's comments above point to this contradiction/ambiguity regarding the Latina identity. In some ways, she perpetuates the essentialist assumption that the Latina identity has a fixed meaning, insofar as she posits that it is 'a huge part' of who she is, yet she is unable to articulate precisely what that

⁵⁵² Ferrera in Keeps, 'God Bless America', p. 144

⁵⁵³ Ferrera in Keeps, 'God Bless America', p. 143

⁵⁵⁴ Keeps, 'God Bless America', p. 143

⁵⁵⁵ Ferrera in Keeps, 'God Bless America', p. 143

⁵⁵⁶ Ella Shohat (1991) 'Ethnicities-in-Relation: Toward a Multicultural Reading of American Cinema', in Leister D. Friedman (ed) Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, pp. 215-251

⁵⁵⁷ Shohat, 'Ethnicities-in-Relation', p. 216

meaning is (beyond an association with cuisine), and how it intersects/constructs her identity. Nevertheless, she suggests that her ethnicity is somehow intrinsic, fixed and 'authentic', and seamlessly integrated into an American identity (which intriguingly, is also articulated through cuisine).

This discourse is affirmed in a 2009 issue of Elle magazine. In a feature titled 'The Mentalists', which features twelve inspirational women, Ferrera achieved the top position 'because she made ugly the new badass.'⁵⁵⁸ In the accompanying interview, Ferrera talks candidly about her ethnicity and the opportunities for Latina actresses in Hollywood. She recalls:

When I was 17, this script I loved called for a blond girl with blue eyes. The director said, 'I think you're great, but this isn't the right thing.' So I decided, half joking and half not, to bleach my hair blonde...and put white powder on my face. And I put myself on tape and sent it to him. He called me, laughing, like Thank you for this, but you still don't have the part. I was devastated because it was the first time I felt I wasn't given the chance to fail on my own...I destroyed my hair for nothing.⁵⁵⁹

The above passage speaks to the pressures of the 'image-obsessed' culture discussed above and serves as a 'cautionary tale.' Here, Ferrera discourages readers from transforming their identity in order to conform to an ideal. Therefore, this passage contributes to the construction of Ferrera as a role model and a responsible fashion icon.

'Ugly Betty is *HOT!*': Makeover Narratives and The 'Self as Project'

Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that America Ferrera appears on the cover of Glamour's '1st Annual Figure-Flattery' issue. The image of Ferrera in a bespoke violet Versace gown is surrounded by a series of headlines related to the 'improvement' of the female body. These include: 'How any body can be a bombshell', '101 ways to dress your body better: clothes, lingerie and pro tricks to transform you' and '[t]he secret reason women gain weight and how to stop'.⁵⁶⁰ These headlines could engender an antifeminist reading - as female readers are encouraged to change/police their appearance - thus the use of Ferrera as the cover girl could be perceived as an attempt to offset any potentially problematical interpretations. Ferrera's position as a responsible fashion icon suggests that self-surveillance and 'improvement' of the self through the fashion and beauty practices can be

⁵⁵⁸ Rachel Rosenblit (April 2009) 'The Mentalists', Elle, p. 228

⁵⁵⁹ Ferrera in Rosenblit, 'The Mentalists', p. 229

⁵⁶⁰ (October 2007), Glamour

both pleasurable and in some way ‘progressive’. Indeed, Ferrera’s corporeal and ethnic difference suggests that the magazine is seeking to offer a sense of diversity. Rather than promoting a homogenous understanding of femininity – the headlines above addresses the readers as ‘individuals’ (there is an emphasis on ‘how *any* body can be a bombshell’, ‘101 ways to ‘dress *your* body better’) [my emphasis]. This is further reinforced by the accompanying interview in which Ferrera claims ‘I know that having the perfect body doesn’t make you love yourself more... It’s all about being comfortable in your own skin.’⁵⁶¹ The following article then, suggests that Ferrera embodies a Latina femininity which she is comfortable with. However, the term ‘bombshell’ which is repeatedly employed throughout the issue, is often used in relation to white femininity (i.e. ‘blonde’ bombshell’).⁵⁶² This suggests that Ferrera engages in fashion and beauty practices which allow her to police her potentially ‘disruptive’ and ‘unruly’ ethnic body. Indeed, when asked if she ever went through a ‘Betty-like awkward phase’, Ferrera describes her body in those terms often used to categorise the ethnic body as unruly. She professes, ‘I had really frizzy hair, that extra freshman 15 from eating disgusting grilled cheese sandwiches everyday in the cafeteria and bushy eyebrows’.⁵⁶³ This description of a pre-famous Ferrera, is strikingly similar to her character onscreen (whose eyebrows are constantly ridiculed by her co-workers, Marc and Amanda). It is important to note however, that while the text encourages a relationship between on and offscreen personae, the image of Ferrera in an Oscar De La Renta cocktail dress reminds readers that she is anything *but* ‘ugly’.

Arguably, the glamorous images of Ferrera serve as visual representations of her success, and therefore perpetuate the myth of ethnicity as ‘individual empowerment’, which in this case is associated with consumption. Underlying the ‘success myth’ and the ‘fantasy of ethnicity’ then, is the notion that Ferrera’s potentially ‘disruptive’ body can be improved through participation in *Western* fashion and beauty practices. This is exemplified in the accompanying feature which positions Ferrera as ‘style icon’ and cultural intermediary. As with SJP’s ‘Why Don’t You...? Column, Ferrera disseminates her own tips to readers. However, Ferrera’s advice is confined to fashion. The feature, titled ‘4 ways America

⁵⁶¹ Ferrera cited in Laurie Sandell (October 2007) ‘Surprise! She’s a Bombshell (and you can be one too)’, *Glamour*, p. 288

⁵⁶² See Pam Cook (2001) ‘The Trouble with Sex: Diana Dors and the Blonde Bombshell Phenomenon’, in Bruce Babington (eds) *British Stars and Stardom: From Alma Taylor to Sean Connery*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 167-179

⁵⁶³ Ferrera cited in Sandell ‘Surprise! She’s a Bombshell’, p. 288

Flatters Her Body', details Ferrera's 'personal principles' which allow her to 'flatter' her figure (these include 'Know your body', 'Frequent your tailor', 'Have a few go-to pieces' and 'Figure out which shapes you should avoid'.⁵⁶⁴ Ferrera's 'personal' approach to fashion, I would argue, serves to reaffirm the notion that fashion and femininities are in some way 'individual' (again, there is an emphasis on *your* body). As such, Ferrera is able to assimilate through consumption and ownership of her own 'self-regulated' ethnic body. When combined, these narratives further fuel the understanding that Ferrera's ethnic star body is both authentic and empowered. However, the accompanying glamorous image of Ferrera in an Oscar de la Renta gown, with full make up and hair extensions, suggests that she engages in more self-regulatory behaviour than her personal 'tips' printed below. The beauty practices which allow her to achieve a glamorous look remain mystified.

The headline of the Glamour interview reads 'Surprise! She's a Bombshell (and you can be one too)'. Not only does this suggest that the article functions as a pedagogical tool, but it also seeks to encourage a relationship between star and audience which pivots on the notion that stars are both like, and unlike, 'ordinary' people. Similarly, the tagline accompanying the interview (cited at the beginning of this chapter) invites audiences to '[r]ead on for more reasons to love her, and easy ways to dress your own body.' Arguably, the article seeks to present Ferrera's position as the non-'ideal' body as a point of entry for readers – 'a reason to love her'.⁵⁶⁵ As such Ferrera's star body is associated with notions of ordinariness designed to appeal to potential audiences - audiences which, as Beltran has noted, are constructed as inherently white.⁵⁶⁶ Moreover, I would suggest that it is precisely because of Ferrera's associations within individuality –as demonstrated above, which seek to address potential readers/viewers as 'individuals' rather than a homogenous white audience.

The representation of Ferrera's star body in Glamour magazine focuses around narratives of transformation and self improvement - a recurrent trope of 'makeover' features which, as demonstrated in Chapter Six, is central to Ugly Betty's narrative. Therefore, the remainder of this section further interrogates the use of Betty in Ferrera's star image and its role within discourses of the makeover and her role as a fashion icon. This is especially important given that following the success of the show's first series, Ferrera's exposure

⁵⁶⁴ Anon (October 2007) '4 Ways America Flatters Her Body', Glamour p. 292

⁵⁶⁵ Sandell, 'Surprise! She's a Bombshell', p. 289

⁵⁶⁶ Beltran, 'The Hollywood Latina Body as Site of Social Struggle', pp. 275-287

increased within celebrity texts. People magazine for example, began to feature Ferrera in their 'Style Watch' pages, 'Best Dressed Lists' and 'Most Beautiful People' issues.

In his article 'Makeover Morality and Consumer Culture', Guy Redden offers a detailed analysis of the function of the makeover in the contemporary moment. He suggests that a specific set of cultural and economic circumstances are in some way connected to/responsible for the ubiquity of makeover. In so doing, he describes how the makeover speaks to, and in some ways offsets, concerns about the increasingly 'fragmented' social identities which are symptomatic of postmodern culture. He asserts that '[l]ines of social identity are not drawn uniformly in all shows. The allure of the makeover cuts across classes, ages and genders, and includes ethnic and sexual minorities.'⁵⁶⁷ Redden therefore implies that the 'makeover' is 'inclusive' in its nature. He accounts for this 'inclusiveness' by arguing that 'the subjects of the makeovers are not made to stand for categories that are isolated and subject to analysis in social terms.'⁵⁶⁸ It is important here not to overstate this notion of 'inclusiveness', given that the notion of the 'empowered consumer' (as discussed in Chapter Six) is only available to those individuals with economic capital.

Similarly, it is pertinent to acknowledge the problems inherent in the assumption that 'the subject is not made to stand for a category', as issues of social and cultural identity are always present within the makeover narrative. However, Redden rightly acknowledges the importance of the individual within the makeover, which is especially useful when considering ethnicity and stardom - given that stars are said to maintain the myth of individualism.⁵⁶⁹ Moreover, these discourses are central to Ferrera's construction as a fashion icon, and her appeal to audiences - as it has been argued that the makeover 'is an important source from which people draw notions of conduct for comparison and possible emulation.'⁵⁷⁰ Indeed, this function of the makeover is central to Ferrera's representation in the 'Style Watch' pages and 'Best Dressed' lists, and further demonstrates the value of fashion as the 'connective tissue' between the star and audience.⁵⁷¹

Within these features, Ferrera is constantly discussed in relation to her onscreen persona. However, the articles are committed to demonstrating her physical difference. In an August

⁵⁶⁷ Guy Redden (2007) 'Makeover Morality and Consumer Culture' in Dana Heller, Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled, London and New York: I.B Tauris p. 160

⁵⁶⁸ Redden, 'Makeover Morality and Consumer Culture', p. 151

⁵⁶⁹ Dyer, Stars

⁵⁷⁰ Redden, 'Makeover Morality and Consumer Culture', p. 160

⁵⁷¹ Moseley, 'Introduction', p. 6

2007 'Style Watch' feature, an image of Ferrera on the red carpet at the Imagen Awards is situated above the tagline '*Ugly* who?'.⁵⁷² Similarly, a 'Best Dressed Feature' includes Ferrera in a Badgley Mischka gown and the quote 'I have fun getting out of the Betty-wear and dressing up'.⁵⁷³ and in a June 2007 'Style Watch' feature which reveals Ferrera's 'must have fashion and beauty items', asks 'What does *Ugly Betty*'s alter ego rely on to stay beautiful?'.⁵⁷⁴ As such, the examples above seek to present Ferrera as a more glamorous version of her onscreen persona, which of course, is reminiscent of the ways in which stars are discussed (as more glamorous versions of *ourselves*). This is perhaps more explicit within certain celebrity intertexts which often use images of Ferrera in full Betty costume alongside more glamorous images of the actress, thereby functioning as a 'before and after feature'. For example, *People* magazine's 'World's Most Beautiful' issue contains an article called 'Not So Ugly Betties', the tagline of which reads 'They play meek, geek and fashionably challenged on TV but off screen these sexy stars shine'.⁵⁷⁵ This article is explicitly structured as a 'makeover' feature and uses a glamorous full page image of Ferrera as 'the after' juxtaposed with a smaller image in the top left corner of Ferrera as Betty as 'the before'. The accompanying images then, offer two versions of Ferrera's image – both of which are equally constructed (we are offered the 'glamorised' offscreen version and the comic 'unglamorised' onscreen version there is no suggestion of a 'real' version). That said, these conflicting images, I would suggest, do serve an important function, insofar as they allow Ferrera to appear desirable and traverse the 'ordinary/extraordinary' paradox.⁵⁷⁶

While it has been claimed that contemporary celebrity texts seek to de-glamorise the celebrity image, within the material surveyed here there appears to be a great investment in presenting Ferrera as glamorous. Indeed it has long since been argued that 'the whole media construction of stars encourages us to think in terms of "really"'.⁵⁷⁷ In other words, audiences are encouraged to search for the 'real' celebrity *behind* the image. As Gamson observes, celebrity texts have been/remain integral in both perpetuating this desire and offering audiences a site within which it may be possible to locate the celebrity's 'real'

⁵⁷² Anon (11/6/07) 'Style Watch', *People*, p. 163

⁵⁷³ Jenny Sundel (12/2/07) 'Best Dressed' *People*, p. 67

⁵⁷⁴ Anon (11/6/07) 'Style Watch', *People*, p. 163

⁵⁷⁵ Anon (7/5/07) 'Not So Ugly Betties', *People* p. 151

⁵⁷⁶ Dyer, *Stars*,

⁵⁷⁷ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, p. 2

self. For example, in the contemporary period, those ‘off-guard, unkempt, unready, unsanitised’⁵⁷⁸ features committed to de-glamorising the celebrity body are vital to this process.

Ferrera’s image rarely appears in those features designed to offer glimpses of the ‘off-guard’ celebrity, but rather as previously mentioned, often appears in best dressed lists, and ‘Style Watch features’ which secures her position as a fashion icon. This apparent lack of desire to *deconstruct* Ferrera’s star image, I would argue, is inherently connected to her ethnic meaning and its associations with ‘authenticity’. As Dyer, famously argues, whiteness is often equated with an absence of racial identity.⁵⁷⁹ Similarly, Richard Alba has acknowledged that ‘[w]hites are largely free to identify themselves as they will’,⁵⁸⁰ and as such, appear to have no fixed identity. Therefore, I would argue, that the supposed absence of racial identity of the white star, is a driving force behind the contemporary preoccupation with ‘prodding, probing and exposing’ the white celebrity’s ‘real’ identity. Moreover, in his examination of the thin white body in advertising, Redmond argues that thin white women could be conceived as ‘emptying their bodies of signs and codes of femininity.’⁵⁸¹ This again points to a conclusion that the white female body is ‘lacking’ in identity. Thus, the white celebrity body is often presented as in need of further de-constructing in the hope of locating the ‘real’ self, precisely because of its supposed fluid/lack of identity. The non-white star image, which shores up essentialist ideologies of authenticity and ordinariness, is arguably seen to require no such de-construction. Ferrera’s authenticity is assumed and therefore the overtly constructed images of her (as both comic unglamorised Betty, and glamorous offscreen Ferrera) which circulate in fashion and celebrity texts are authenticated because of her associations with the essentialist Latina identity.

As such, these makeover images could function to demonstrate the pleasure/ benefits of constructing the ‘self as project’ without threatening to expose fashion as an entirely performative and disingenuous practice. Indeed, Ferrera’s makeover is presented as a successful transformation from ‘beautiful on the inside’ Betty to legitimate glamorous star,

⁵⁷⁸ C. Llewellyn-Smith (2002) *Poplife: a Journey by Sofa*, Sceptre: London, p. 120

⁵⁷⁹ Richard Dyer (1997) *White* London and New York: Routledge

⁵⁸⁰ Richard Alba (1990) *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America*, New Haven: Yale University Press p. 295

⁵⁸¹ Sean Redmond (2003) ‘Thin White Women in Advertising: Deathly Corporeal’, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 3:2, p. 189

and as such this qualifies her as both a point of entry for audience and tastemaker. While narratives of transformation and self improvement have long since been central to star and celebrity culture (and indeed ‘women’s culture’ – films, magazines), Ferrera’s explicit, and recurrent, associations with makeover culture thus have required closer examination. Indeed, the makeover trope, as demonstrated above, articulates some complex and contradictory attitudes regarding the ethnic identity. Moreover, when framed within the context of celebrity culture, these discourses become in some ways magnified and have a greater social significance. As such, Ferrera’s position as a cultural intermediary, I would argue, not only seeks to educate consumers in practices of discernment and taste, but also allows readers to exercise cultural competences in *reading* fashion as a marker of cultural identity.

In opposition to SJP, it would seem that Ferrera’s role as a fashion icon aims to promote knowledge of everyday fashion and lifestyle practices rather than offering (albeit controlled) access to couture. This, I would suggest, is potentially problematic insofar as it reinforces boundaries which preserve *couture* solely for the white upper-class, from which Ferrera is excluded. This is not to suggest, however, that Ferrera does not have access to couture (for as evidenced by Marie Claire and Glamour she appears in Versace and Oscar de la Renta gowns) but rather, that unlike SJP, Ferrera has not appeared on the cover of any high-brow fashion magazine – and if indeed one consults the Vogue cover archive it is apparent that the publication elects to use white models. That said, there is of course the possibility that Ferrera chooses to be associated with ‘everyday’ fashion and promote ‘responsible’ consumption. This is most evident in the ‘Fashion with a Heart’ campaign outlined above which pivots on Ferrera’s connection to ordinariness.

As demonstrated with regard to the other case studies examined here, ordinariness and authenticity is vital to the construction of the star as fashion icon/cultural intermediary. Moreover, fashion is the ‘connective tissue’ between stars and audiences. However, as Powell and Prasad note, if celebrities become too ‘ordinary’ and neglect their role as ‘extraordinary’, ‘the illusion is ruptured and the staged ‘ordinariness’ becomes just plain ordinary.’⁵⁸² Thus, the continual circulation of Ferrera’s glamorised self is crucial to preserving her symbolic value. Ferrera’s ‘ordinariness’ is assumed – as is her authenticity,

⁵⁸² Helen Powell and Sylvie Prasad (2007) ‘Life Swap: Celebrity Expert as Lifestyle Adviser’ in Dana Heller Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled, London: I.B. Tauris, p. 60

and as such the glamorised version of Ferrera's star image functions as 'extraordinary'. This incarnation of the ordinary/extraordinary paradox speaks to the mythology surrounding the female star body – which I argue is perpetuated within the circulation of Ferrera's star image. As discussed here, I suggest that it is precisely Ferrera's 'ethnic meaning' which allows her to function as knowable, yet 'ambiguous'. This is therefore central to her position as a cultural intermediary and 'everyday' fashion icon.

Finally, it is important to note that, within the material surveyed throughout this section, the claims of the increasing 'choice' and 'flexibility' of an 'image-based' identity are prominent within celebrity intertexts. This is to be expected given that the celebrity intertexts foreground an advertorial discourse and thus seek to encourage consumers to purchase/use material (which they suggest contribute to the construction/performance of self-identity). That said, it is clear that the sources also offer a counter-discourse which reinforces the importance of cultural power structures in shaping identity, and suggest that more traditional classed/gendered/racial identities remain dominant in society. In so doing, the celebrity intertexts can offer specific competences (to specific readerships) so that readers/consumers can become adept at subverting and resisting these traditional cultural identities.

Conclusion

In the conclusion to her book Costume and Cinema, Sarah Street suggests that:

A potentially productive area [of study] is a consideration of costumes in television. With its assumed affinity to realism, the mise-en-scene of television drama has rarely been examined with the thoroughness of film analysis. Yet, costumes are a key element of television dramas, soaps, sit-coms and even the news.⁵⁸³

One of the primary concerns of this thesis has been to contribute to this barren area of study. However, it would be impossible to offer a full analysis of the range of television genres suggested by Street here (for each would warrant an individual study of this length). Moreover, the vast genre of ‘television drama’ would require further subdivision. As such, within this thesis, I have focussed on a specific category of contemporary US television drama, singled out by the popular press as unique (and innovative) in its use of onscreen fashion.

As discussed in the introduction, both fashion and television have long since been considered as distinctly ‘feminine’ cultures. Resultantly, both have struggled to gain cultural legitimacy within both popular and academic discourse. Indeed, the dearth of work in the area of television costume suggests that these concerns continue to resonate.

Given the lack of historical literature on television costume, as previously discussed, I am reluctant to situate contemporary fashion programming as an entirely ‘new’ category. Indeed, with no historical narrative as a reference point, this would be impossible to assert with any great certainty. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that the industrial, economic, and cultural circumstances specific to this time period inform the precise ways in which onscreen fashion functions in relation to the case studies examined here.

In selecting fashion programming as the object of this study, I have examined two extremely pervasive (in terms of their impact in ‘everyday life’) cultural industries, at a moment of intriguing intersection. In so doing, I have revealed a series of complex industrial strategies which have impacted upon the texts and intertexts examined here. Furthermore, my analysis of trade press, texts and celebrity intertexts further confirms the important ideological functions of fashion programming – which as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis could not have been drawn out without the aid of a multidimensional

⁵⁸³ Street, Costume and Cinema, p. 103

approach. In other words, were I to conduct this analysis at a purely textual level, I would have been unable to examine the social and cultural function of fashion programming in as much detail. Therefore, in conclusion to this thesis, I seek to summarise and reflect upon the themes discussed here, and proffer a wider context within which fashion programming can be interrogated.

Industrial Strategies

As the first section of this thesis demonstrates, fashion programming emerges in the midst of seismic shifts within both the television and fashion industries. In his book The Small Screen, Brian L. Ott offers a cultural history of US prime time television and suggests that the 1990s was a period of dramatic change.⁵⁸⁴ Ott's work centres on what he terms the 'information age' (although some would term it postmodernity, or at the very least, a symptom of postmodern culture), the social anxieties it engenders, and the ways in which television discourse responds to these anxieties. In particular, Ott claims that an 'important cultural trend in the 1990s was a fascination within spectacle... Culture in the nineties glowed red hot, as image and surface were privileged over substance and depth.'⁵⁸⁵

Indeed, it could be argued that this supposed shift, thought to be symptomatic of postmodern culture, informs the industrial discourse analysed in the first section of the thesis which examines the shifting boundaries of 'legitimate' culture and the legitimisation of fashion programming. However, there is a danger in constructing postmodernism as an overarching metanarrative which could result in losing sight of some of the complexities and intricacies of the developing relations between fashion and television.⁵⁸⁶ In particular, it would fail to acknowledge the ways in which traditional power structures of gender and class play an important role in the shaping of attitudes towards fashion programming. For example, within the first chapter, it is apparent that fashion programming - specifically its preoccupation with 'feminine', 'visual' culture - is problematic for an industry which sought to legitimise screen entertainment as popular art. Of course, this discourse engages with the traditional rejection of 'feminine' culture which has long pervaded patriarchal society. However, it also speaks to the familiar (equally gendered) threat of an impending 'flat', 'depthless' and 'superficial' culture. These concerns resonate in early issues of the

⁵⁸⁴ Ott, The Small Screen

⁵⁸⁵ Ott, The Small Screen, p. 22

⁵⁸⁶ In addition, using postmodernism as a metanarrative would go against one of its apparent principles – i.e. to break down the metanarratives of the modern culture.

‘Fashion in Entertainment’ special issues which struggle to place fashion programming within a ‘legitimate’ hierarchy.

Thus, The Hollywood Reporter seeks to dispel anxieties that fashion programming is symptomatic of the ‘style over substance’ motif of so-called postmodern culture by situating it within a more ‘legitimate’ history of screen media. As discussed in Chapter One, the trade press seeks to draw parallels between the US contemporary fashion programming and classical Hollywood fashion films. Despite the fact that this particular era was considered by filmmakers at the time to be unabashedly commercial, it has since acquired a privileged position within contemporary culture as a ‘legitimate’, ‘popular art’, canonised within both the industry and the academy.

Discourses of ‘art’ and ‘commerce’ very much shape the cultural commentary in both the fashion and the television trade press, precisely because both fashion and television have a somewhat ambiguous relationship to ‘legitimate culture’.⁵⁸⁷ As Wilson notes, with regard to fashion and photography (though it could also be applied to television), ‘both are liminal forms, on the threshold between art and not art.’⁵⁸⁸ Indeed, within the late 1990s, the cultural and symbolic value associated with television and fashion was particularly uncertain, owing to a series of industrial shifts which supposedly disrupted previous cultural hierarchies.

As detailed in Chapter One, in the 1990s the fashion industry experienced a supposed ‘democratisation of fashion’ which threatened the cultural legitimacy of ‘high fashion’. Equally, the economic and industrial changes within US network television altered contemporary programming. These contemporaneous shifts allowed for designer fashion (both custom made and ‘off-the-rack’) to be exhibited in ‘quality’ US television.

However, this increase in sourced clothing impacted upon the role of the costume designer. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, while fashion industry professionals were no longer concerned about the ‘low’ cultural status of television as a platform for their designs, within the ‘Fashion in Entertainment’ special issues, costume designers expressed anxieties about their changing role within the television industry. The contemporary costume

⁵⁸⁷ While recent developments within popular and academic discourse suggest that there has been an emergence of ‘quality television’, I would argue that television remains for the most part, low in terms of cultural status.

⁵⁸⁸ Wilson, Adorned in Dreams, p. 1

designer is no longer responsible for designing and constructing garments for characters, instead designers provide pieces which must be incorporated into the casts' wardrobe. Within the television industry discourse, this shift ignited concerns that contemporary costume designers would lose their creative autonomy. Furthermore, this contemporary crisis is buttressed by nostalgic accounts of costume design within the studio system (often referencing the work of Edith Head and Gilbert Adrian) which serve to legitimate the profession. Indeed, Head, and to a lesser extent Adrian, have achieved a level of visibility which rivals directors of the classical era.⁵⁸⁹

However, these pejorative attitudes towards contemporary costume design shift within the later issues of The Hollywood Reporter. Indeed, the role is rearticulated as 'creative shopping'. This of course speaks to the changing attitudes towards 'production' and 'consumption'. That is, consumption has traditionally been viewed by Marxist critics as 'passive' - and as Hollows notes 'not work' - in opposition to 'production' which is viewed as 'active', and associated with 'labour'. Indeed, more recent feminist scholarship seeks to revise this (gendered) dichotomy and offer a more positive assessment of the activity of consumption, arguing that the activity of consumption requires sophisticated cultural competences, and as such, should not be dismissed as simply 'passive'.⁵⁹⁰ Within the later issues of the fashion and television trade press, the costume designer earns a greater critical respect (indeed, Patricia Field is to some extent considered a 'tastemaker').

A similar narrative is developed with regard to the television celebrity. While early work on stardom and celebrity has insisted upon a hierarchy of fame, within which film stardom is privileged over television stardom, the industrial discourse reflects/contributes to the destabilising of traditional hierarchies of fame and arguably seeks to 'legitimise' the television star. Furthermore, reports within the television trade press detail the increasing involvement of female television celebrities in the promotion of fashion, which is viewed as confirmation of the television celebrities' legitimisation.

Given that the celebrity image has long been used in the promotion of consumer goods, it is to be expected that potential changes within consumer society should impact upon celebrity culture. Thus, the democratisation of fashion (detailed in Chapter One), and the

⁵⁸⁹ For example, Edith Head's papers (including memos and designs) have been archived at the Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles.

⁵⁹⁰ See Partington, 'Popular Fashion and Working Class Affluence'

increasing cultural and symbolic value of contemporary programming has undoubtedly contributed to the increasing visibility of the female television celebrity in the contemporary era. Thus, as the above summary makes clear, the industrial shifts which contribute to/engineer the increase in fashion programming are connected to several interrelated tensions regarding gender and the acquisition of cultural and symbolic value by fashion programming and the female television celebrity. Indeed, as all of the shifts outlined above were initially met with hostility, an analysis of the trade discourse illuminates a shift in the boundaries of 'legitimate' culture and taste.

Textual Strategies

Within the textual analysis section of this thesis it became clear precisely how these industrial changes (and broader cultural shifts) have informed the function of onscreen fashion within fashion programming. Indeed, the supposed contemporary fascination with 'spectacle', has particular currency within debates about fashion and costume, and as I contend in Chapter Four, is also central to the costuming in SATC – indeed, the concept of 'self-conscious spectacularity' was developed by Bruzzi and Church Gibson in reference to SATC.⁵⁹¹

This supposed contemporary preoccupation with 'spectacle' divides critics. While in some cases this cultural turn was indicative of a loss of 'depth' and a move toward 'superficiality', others viewed the shift as a 'subversive' disruption of traditional, patriarchal hierarchies. Indeed, it is the latter, which I argue motivates Field's approach to costuming within SATC (which embraces fashion articulated as 'spectacle'). Furthermore, as my analysis of the 'shopping sequences' evidences, it is used to express narrative developments.

In addition, the narrative within SATC seeks to interrogate the social anxieties which are often viewed as a resultant effect of the so-called postmodern turn. Specifically, the narrative addresses the concerns which arise with regards to consumer culture and 'appropriate' consumer behaviour. These concerns are, of course, often implicit within discussions of contemporary capitalist society. This is most apparent in the construction of Carrie and her consumer behaviour - she is neither an 'appropriate consumer', insofar as she spends beyond her means, nor is she an 'unsophisticated consumer', as she possesses

⁵⁹¹ Bruzzi and Church Gibson, 'Fashion is the Fifth Character', p. 123

the ‘aesthetic disposition’. As such, she provides a reference point for audiences who may be faced with similar consumer choices in ‘everyday’ life. Moreover, her eclectic costuming signals the apparently ‘endless’ possibilities offered to women in the contemporary period, with regard to fashioning cultural identities.

As discussed at length in this thesis, fashion fosters a varied and complex relationship with self identity. It has long since been argued that fashion can both express cultural identity or be used to obscure it. Indeed, the supposed ‘democratisation’ of fashion exaggerates anxieties that fashion blurs the boundaries of class and gendered identities. It can be argued that the texts examined here, seek to articulate both positive and negative responses to the supposed fragmentation of identity within the postmodern era. While, for the most part, Carrie exemplifies a celebratory attitude towards fashion as bricolage, a counter discourse expresses the difficulty in performing an alternative identity and contends that one’s ‘real’ self is always apparent.

Similarly, the onscreen fashion in The O.C. explores the possibilities offered by fashion in terms of social mobility, but ultimately supports the ideology that the ‘authentic’ self can also be located. This is not to suggest that the onscreen fashion in The O.C. does not operate in complex and diverse ways. Indeed, the show offers a commentary on the interplay between the mainstream and subcultural style. Moreover, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, The O.C., in some ways, subverts the typically gendered nature of this dichotomy.

Indeed, this attitude toward mainstream and subcultural styles can also be attributed to a broader shift within contemporary culture. Indeed, it should be noted that the boundaries between mainstream and subculture are perceived to be increasingly blurred. As Wilson notes in her article ‘Fashion and Postmodernism’, ‘[t]oday there is a blurring between mainstream and countercultural fashions: *all* fashion has become “stage”, self-conscious about its own status as a discourse, about its irrationality, about its message’[my emphasis].⁵⁹² This is perhaps best exemplified by Ugly Betty.

As with SATC, the onscreen fashion within Ugly Betty is articulated as ‘spectacle’. In contrast to SATC, the ‘spectacular’ fashion can, on occasion, function as an object of

⁵⁹² Elizabeth Wilson (2006) [1990] ‘Fashion and Postmodernism’ in John Storey (eds) Cultural Theory and Popular Culture Third Edition, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, p. 430

ridicule and thus can be read as a critique of postmodern attitudes towards fashion in the contemporary period. Nevertheless, Ugly Betty does convey an investment in, and is celebratory of, 'camp' costuming. In opposition to the other case studies discussed, Ugly Betty rejects the assumption that an 'authentic' identity can be located and can be read as a celebration of the shift toward a 'fragmented' identity facilitated by contemporary fashion practices.

Despite their contradictory attitudes toward fashion and its relationship to identity, all three shows foreground the importance of fashion in the construction of cultural identities (whether it be 'authentic' or performative). In so doing, the narrative and aesthetic focus on fashion within the three case studies examined here seek to reject notions of fashion as 'trivial' and 'superficial', foregrounding its more 'serious' role as a marker of cultural identity.

Celebrity Culture

The onscreen roles of the lead characters within the above case studies clearly inform their construction as fashion icons in extra-textual discourses. Indeed, both television and film stardom has long since pivoted on the assumption that the roles actors play onscreen inform audience perceptions of their star persona. That said, the star is also characterised by its 'incompleteness'. Indeed, because of the complex and myriad ways in which fashion can be used (and constructed) within the examples of fashion programming above, the lead actors are equally 'fragmented' and 'incoherent'.

As John Ellis argues, the star image is deliberately constructed as 'incomplete', to encourage 'an infinite cycle of consumption'.⁵⁹³ While this has been central to the star system since the studio era, this particular mode of address is especially pertinent in the postmodern period, where 'ordinary' individuals are perceived to be equally 'incomplete' in search of a 'whole,' 'authentic' identity.

Writing in the late 1990s, David Shenk develops the term 'fragmentia' which he defines as '[a] relatively new cognitive disorder where one feels cut off from a sense of wholeness because of common exposure to incomplete parts of things and ideas.'⁵⁹⁴ Indeed, one can

⁵⁹³ Ellis paraphrased in Su Holmes (2005) British TV & Film Culture in the 1950s: Coming to a TV Near You, Bristol: Intellect p. 197

⁵⁹⁴ David Shenk (1997) Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut, New York: Harper Collins p. 37

easily view contemporary celebrity images as contributing to ‘fragmentia,’ insofar as it is constructed as ‘incomplete parts of things and ideas’ which individuals are ‘exposed’ to on a regular basis. However, rather than contributing to the ‘fragmentation’ of contemporary cultural identities, my research indicates that the star images of SJP, Adam Brody, and America Ferrera, are offered as guides, teaching individuals how to make sense of/ and construct contemporary cultural identities through fashion and consumption practices.

As such, the star images examined here function as cultural intermediaries, responsible for disseminating information about ‘appropriate’, yet ‘creative’(in terms of identity construction) consumption. SJP’s continual appearances in ‘Style Watch’ features in People Magazine, affirms her position as a style icon. Moreover, her representation in the Harper’s Bazaar article as a fashion and ‘lifestyle’ expert allows her to occupy a position as ‘tastemaker’. As Chapter Seven demonstrates in detail, SJP’s star image arguably serves to rearticulate class boundaries which have supposedly been destabilised within contemporary culture, while simultaneously celebrating the move towards individual ‘choice’. Similarly, Adam Brody can be viewed as performing an important role within the contemporary moment insofar as he encourages men to engage in consumer practices.

As Frank Mort’s comments (cited in Chapter Eight) suggest, the masculine identity is increasingly fragmented and no longer defined in relation to (the typically ‘masculine’) activity of labour/production. Brody therefore offers a version of masculine identity which can be performed through dress. Unlike the ‘new man’ or the ‘metrosexual’, Brody’s ‘geek chic’ is rooted in the discourses of ‘subculture’ and uses fashion as a form of (albeit attenuated) resistance. In promoting this particular kind of engagement with fashion and consumer practices, Brody dispels concerns that an interest in fashion is ‘feminine’ or ‘trivial’. However, this of course has troubling consequences from a feminist perspective, insofar as it continues to privilege ‘masculine’ values over ‘feminine’ values.

Ferrera, while also arguably a cultural intermediary and ‘tastemaker’ in her own right, performs a complex role within contemporary consumer culture. Within celebrity intertexts, Ferrera’s onscreen representation of the comically and overtly ‘ugly’ Betty is continually counterbalanced by the use of her overtly ‘glamorous’ star image. Resultantly, there are no ‘ordinary’ images of Ferrera. Her image serves as a ‘simulacra’. In many ways then, her image is perhaps the most incoherent insofar as there is no ‘ordinary’ or

‘authentic’ image available (while, of course, all the case studies are *representations* of the ‘real’, the ‘ordinary’ images hold the promise of an ‘authentic’ self). Thus, Ferrera’s ‘authenticity’ is simply *assumed*. As argued in the chapter, the celebrity intertexts work to affirm her by promoting essentialist ideologies associated with ethnicity, suggesting that despite the continual assertion that the contemporary period fractures traditional models of cultural identity, ethnic identity continues to be imbued with ‘authentic’ meaning.

Despite the varied ways in which these celebrity images function within intertexts, it is clear that each offers a space where issues regarding the function of fashion within contemporary culture can be further interrogated. Indeed, their representation in celebrity magazines allows audiences the opportunity to continue to practice the same skills in *reading* fashion as a marker of cultural identity as those encouraged within the programmes.

While I suggest that the conjunction of approaches and sources employed in this research has been useful, there are of course wider questions of reception raised throughout this work which require analysis from an audience studies perspective (which again, would require another study of this length). Indeed, it would be interesting to examine the ways in which audiences *do* respond to the star images and texts analysed here. However, this initial inquiry into television costume at the level of production, text and intertext had to be established before such research could take place. Moreover, as it stands, this work is relevant in a myriad of ways as it can serve to illuminate developments within television culture in the contemporary period. It can also offer context for the important and emerging work within fashion theory that considers the varied and complex relationship between fashion and self identity. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, it contributes to the important body of work which seeks to take both fashion, and ‘feminine’ culture seriously.

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Raven, Charlotte (9th February 1999) 'Double Take: All Men are Bastards. Discuss' The Guardian

Rogers, Jessica (11th January 2007) 'The Plain Truth about Betty' Broadcast

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Sutcliffe, Thomas (8th January 2007) 'Skin Deep and Soapy' The Independent

Teen Vogue, September 2006 (US)

Guy Trebay (20th July 2006) 'Roll Up Your Sleeves and Indulge in a Miami Vice' http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/20/fashion/20MIAMI.html?_r=1&pagewanted=1&n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/People/T/Trebay,%20Guy (accessed 21/12/10)

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Vogue, November 2006 (UK)

<http://www.whowhatwear.com/website/full-article/currently-channeling-mary-rhoda/> (accessed 21/12/10)

Wilson, Beryl (29th October 2007) 'At the Water Cooler with *Ugly Betty*'s Mark and Amanda' Grazia

Wiseman, Eva (October 07) 'How I Get Dresses: Patricia Field' The Observer Magazine

Film and Broadcast Media

24 (2001-2010)

Creators: Robert Cochran, Joel Surnow

Costume Designer: James Lapidus

Absolutely Fabulous (1992-2002)

Creator: Bob Spiers

Costume Designer: Sarah Burn

Ally McBeal (1997–2002)

Creator: David E. Kelley

Costume Designers: Mimi Melgaard, Yana Syrkin, Kathleen Detoro, Rachael Stanley

Beachy Couture Documentary (2004)

Creator: Josh Schwartz

Costume Designer: Alexandra Welker

Dallas (1978-1991)

Creator: Leonard Katzman

Costume Designer: Travilla

Desperate Housewives (2004-Present Day)

Creator: Mark Cherry

Costume Designers: Catherine Adair, Marie-Sylvie Deveau, Enid Harris

Felicity (1998–2002)

Creators: J.J. Abrams, Matt Reeves

Costume Designers: Linda Serijan, Eleanor Johnson, Ann Miller

Friends (1994–2004)

Creators: David Crane, Marta Kauffman

Costume Designer: Debra McGuire

Gilmore Girls (2001- 2007)

Creator: Amy Sherman

Costume Designer: Brenda Maben

Golden Girls (1985-1992)

Creator: Terry Hughes

Costume Designer: Judy Evans

Gossip Girl (2007-Present Day)

Creators: Josh Schwarz, Stephanie Savage

Costume Designer: Eric Daman

I Love Lucy (1951- 1957)

Creator: William Asher

Costume Designer: Edward Stevenson

Law and Order (1990–Present Day)

Creator: Dick Wolf

Costume Designer: Jennifer von Mayrhauser, John Boxer, Daniele Hollywood, Suzanne Schwarzer, Thomas Lee Keller, Susan O' Donnell

The Mary Tyler Moore Show (1970- 1977)

Creator: James. L. Brooks

Costume Designers: Leslie Hall

Melrose Place (2009)

Creator: Darren Star

Costume Designer: Emma Trask

Miami Vice (1984–1989)

Creator: Anthony Yerkovich

Costume Designers: Jodie Lynn Tillen, Bambi Breakstone, Bobbi Read

Moesha (1996-2001)

Creator: Henry Chan

Costume Designer: Caroline Marx

NYPD Blue (1993- 2005)

Creator: Steven Bochco

Costume Designer: Brad. R. Lomar

The O.C (2003- 2006)

Creator: Josh Schwartz

Costume Designer: Robin Lewis- West, Alexandra Welker and Karla Stevens

Privileged (2008- 2009)

Creator: Davis Paymer

Costume Designer: Nicole Gorsuch

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (2003- Present Day)

Creator: Davis Collins

Costume Designer: Kitty Boots

Sabrina The Teenage Witch (1996- 2003)

Creator: Nell Scovell

Costume Designer: Rachael Stanley

Sex and the City (1998-2003)

Creator: Darren Starr

Costume Designers: Patricia Field, Rebecca Weinberg, Molly Rogers, Ellen Lutter

Snoops (1999)

Creator: David. E. Kelley

Costume Designer: Alexandra Welker

The Sopranos (1999-2007)

Creator: David Chase

Costume Designers: Juliet Polcsa, Kim Marie Druce, Anne Crabtree

The Soup (June 2004- Present Day)

E! Network

That Girl (1966)

Creator: Hal Cooper

Costume Designer: Phyllis Garr

Thirtysomething (1987–1991)

Creator: Ron Reedy

The View (26th May 2005)

Ugly Betty (2006–2010)

Creator: Silvio Horta

Costume Designer: Eduardo Castro

Veronica's Closet (1997–2000),

Creators: David Crane, Marta Kauffman

Costume Designer: Debra McGuire

Will & Grace (1998-2006),

Creators: David Kohan, Max Mutchnick

Costume Designer: Lori Eskowitz

90210 (2008- Present Day)

Creator: Jeff Judah

Costume Designer: Debra McGuire

Feature Films

Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961)

Director: Blake Edwards

Costume Designer: Edith Head

Honey (2003)

Director: Billie Woodruff

Costume Designer: Susan Matheson

How to Steal a Million (1966)

Director: William Wyler

Costume Designer: Givenchy

Now Voyager (1942)

Director: Irving Rapper

Costume Designer: Orry-Kelly

On The Waterfront (1954)

Director: Elia Kazan

Costume Designer: Anna Hill Johnstone

Pretty Woman (1990)

Director: Garry Marshall

Costume Designer: Marilyn Vance

Real Women Have Curves (2002)

Director: Patricia Cardoso

Costume Designer: Elaine Montalo

Rebel Without a Cause (1955)

Director: Nicholas Ray

Costume Designer: Moss Mabry

Roman Holiday (1953)

Director: William Wyler

Costume Designer: Edith Head

Sabrina (1954)

Director: Billy Wilder

Costume Designer: Edith Head

Sex and the City (2008)

Director: Michael Patrick King

Costume Designers: Patricia Field

The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants (2005)

Director: Ken Kwapis

Costume Designer: Chris Gennarelli

Working Girl (1988)

Director: Mike Nichols

Costume Designer: Ann Roth